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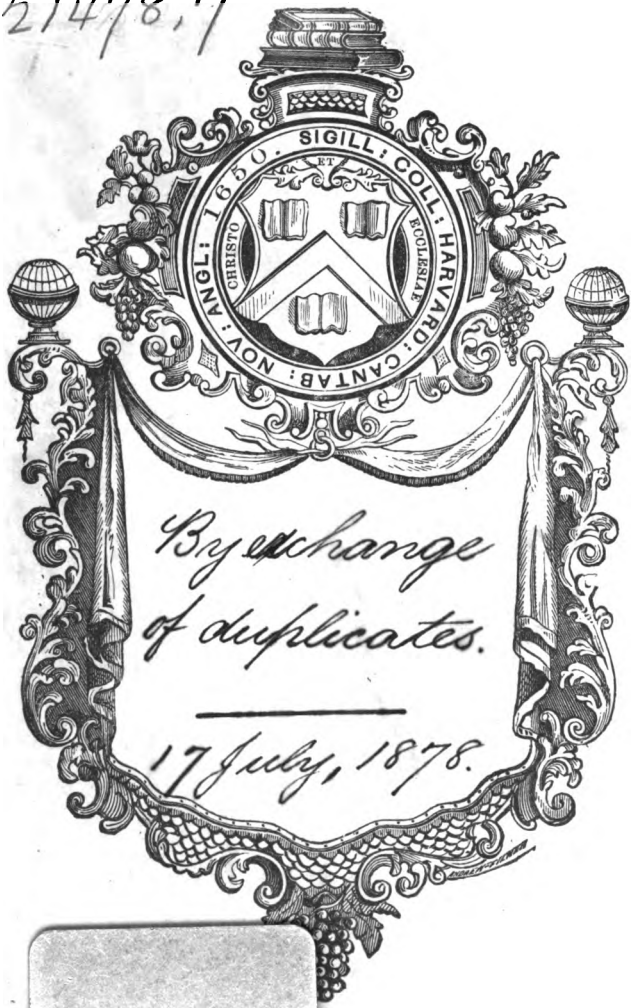
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1878

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MAID ELLICE.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN any one man sets up a claim to be or to possess anything different to his fellows—nay, if it be only a difference which is not superiority, unless a superiority of evil, there will always rise up a dozen other men to dispute that claim and tear it in pieces.

Now, the Hernes of Hernecroft claim to have held that homestead in their family longer, and to date back their ancestry farther, than any other family in England; if not indeed to be lineal descendants of Hengist and Horsa, the first conquerors after the Romans of this sadly often conquered little island.

Naturally, therefore, every neighboring squire and householder of any degree in the county resents this assumption, and declares that it is a figment of the present owner of the place, dressed up to support his affection for the race of his supposed ancestry.

Naturally also Squire Herne is at daggers drawn with two-thirds of his neighbors on this particular subject: the remaining third either preferring to agree with his assumption, or looking on it as a harmless "fad" of the old man's and respecting him too much to disturb it. And yet, I do not know but that he is right; or that any, even of those who wrangle most virulently for priority of ancestry, have been able to fix any particular date, later in English chronology, for the establishment of the Herne family at Hernecroft.

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There was a Herne certainly who was secretary to Ireton the Puritan general; but the old house was in existence then, and his father lived and expounded the Bible therein; and his little, close-coifed, primly-clad sisters gathered daisies and buttercups in the sunny croft at the back of the farm.

And there was a Herne who carried his master's banner before the Earl of Southampton at the battle of Tewkesbury; but when he was borne down by numbers and slain, still grasping the pole of the standard, his last words to the priest who shrived him were, "I leave my body to my wife, Dame Margery of Hernecroft, my soul to Christ the Lord," and so took the crucifix between his hands, and kissing it he died: being then a mighty proper man; and one strong and much renowned for courage in the company of my Lord of Southampton. There was a Herne also of whom we find mention as a valiant trooper, so powerful in the arm as to cleave one Ezekiel, a Jew, through head and trunk at one blow in the Lincolnshire riots. And so the record stretches back, taking up a stray link here, and another there, till it seems as if the present people are right enough in their claims that, though never noble, no, nor even knighted, they are one of the oldest squirearchies in the kingdom, and have steadily passed down their ancient patrimony from the days of the Saxons to the present century.

Exceedingly proud of that fact is the present "Squoire 'Erne" as the country folk call him, some changing the title to "Varmer 'Erne," a declension in dignity of which the gentleman alluded to does not too well approve, though he resents it with much less bitterness than he does the more degenerate and modern prefix of "Mr."

The Saxon origin of his family has indeed become what the neighbors call a "fad," with Squire Herne. His hatred of the French, or the Normans, as he prefers to call them, is as intense as if it were the days of Harold and William the Conqueror; his objection to

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the visits of a neighboring curate because the unfortunate young man's name was Fitz-William being couched in terms strongly suggestive of the bar sinister, and more pointed than polite; and his complaints of the young man's ancestors as a set of frog-eating, leg-shaking, libertine foreigners, the first to bring papistry into this island, and cram it full of lying Jesuits and sniveling nuns, so frequent and virulent, that his son Robert was fain to stagger him by demanding with the irreverence of youth:

"What about Edward the Confessor, though, dad? and St. Dunstan, and all those old Saxon thingummies?" a query which caused Squire Herne to take refuge in a private consultation with his daughter Margaret's childish History of England, after which he said no more of papistry as an innovation of the Normans, preferring to drop that branch of the subject altogether. His devotion to his favorite cause, however, continued as ardent as ever. He used Saxon phrases and turns of speech, wore breeches and leather leggings, and would gladly have clad his womankind in linen coifs and woolen kirtles, if they had not flatly rebelled against such a pitch of domestic tyranny, and struck for modern bonnets and dressmakers. As it was, however, Margaret had never been permitted to put on a pair of stays until her seventeenth year, when her mother in despair procured her one surreptitiously; and his repeated threat to turn out of the house "neck and crop," any female, be she whom she might, who dared to disgrace Hernecroft by such an abomination as a crinoline, had prevented the march of fashion from extending itself in that direction, even when *hen-hoops* were at their largest within the irate old gentleman's domains.

I cannot say that his family sympathised with his peculiarities even when they gave in to them. Mrs. Herne, indeed, one of those good-natured, easy-going women who fall in with everything and every one, offered no oppositions to his whims, but on the contrary, humored them as far as

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she could; but Robert, a sturdy, independent youth, while respecting his father himself, would scoff at his Saxon theories to his face with boyish impertinence, while Margaret, who, by reason of being the Squire's favorite and his only daughter, was the principal victim to his hobby, resented it by a sullen gloom which she did not attempt to hide from him, even though he tried to invent other causes for it for himself.

In another way also his family were a cross to Squire Herne. Saxons being essentially a tall, large-limbed, ruddy-cheeked and fairhaired race, he naturally admired those characteristics beyond all others, and would, if he could, have seen nothing different on the farm, let alone in his family; and spoke with scorn and dislike of "your sallow-faced, black-muzzled Norman visages." In his own person, too, he was a large, thickly-made man, with broad shoulders, a face tanned to one unvaried scarlet by three and fifty summer suns, prominent light-blue, angry-looking eyes, and hair originally a reddish-yellow; but now grizzled into a stubbly, iron-grey crop, a description which, though not perhaps presenting any remarkable beauty to the eye of an unappreciative reader, was, I can assure him, quite sufficiently conformable to the ancient Saxon type to be highly satisfactory to the Squire himself; and one which he reasonably trusted might be perpetuated in his offspring.

A vain hope! Margaret, the younger, was a little tall, unusually so for her age, and broad-shouldered, like her father himself; but her eyes were like sloes, her hair black as a raven's wing, and her face, neck, and arms swarthy as a Spaniard's: while Robert was rather under middle height than the reverse, and a plain likeness of his mother, with brown hair and skin, dark, animated hazel eyes, and a wide mouth, with decided pugnacity and sarcasm about the corners.

Poor Squire Herne! He should have consulted the Saxon type in choosing a spouse; but how could he fancy that Providence would make such a mistake as

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to ignore his own form and features for the inferior ones of Maggie Marshall, or even worse.

And now, after this slight sketch of the inhabitants of the Croft, as Hernecroft was not infrequently called, let us give a glance at the place itself, as it met the eyes of Robert Herne, junior, one morning in early summer.

It was early in the morning too, very early, for the sun had hardly clambered over the low range of hills, or rather downs, lying eastward of the farm. The short green turf sloping downwards from the flattened summit, and dashed here and there by patches of orange gorse or purpled heather, was indeed overlaid with one or two long rays of living gold, which stretched onwards to gild the mossy roof, to glitter on the low, diamond-paned windows, and gleam like sparks of fire among the topmost boughs of the hoary lime and apple trees surrounding the ancient grey-stone house: but the garden, the long daisy-sprinkled grass of the orchard, and the homely, well-to-do-looking rickyard at the back, were still in shade. The dews of night hung heavily as clustered diamonds on the rose-bushes, already weighted with a wealth of pink and crimson blossoms, the beds of old-fashioned-wall-flowers, sweet williams and mignonette, and the tall, snow-white lilies which filled and made sweet the quaint old garden, to which you descended from a broad grassy terrace in front of the sitting-room windows. This garden, hardly distinguishable now in the half-light, was fenced in by a high, closely-woven hedge of privet and sweetbrier, which separated it from the orchard on one side and the farm and poultry-yard on the other, while in front a long meadow studded with oaks and beeches, almost like a gentleman's park, sloped away to the road beyond.

The house itself was most irregular in construction, being built in the form of a square block two stories high, with a wing one story lower, and considerably longer at one side, giving it, but for the multifarious

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chimneys and the shape of the windows, very much the appearance of a church when seen from a distance among its sheltering trees. This wing was indeed a comparatively modern addition, having been built in the days of Queen Elizabeth, in which reign the ruling dame of Hernecroft had presented her spouse with no less than nineteen sturdy citizens of the Virgin Queen, but three hundred years had clothed the new stones as thickly as the old with orange-colored lichens and mosses, green and gold and grey, and had knocked off a coping here and matted an angle there with a web of ivy, besides so browning and mellowing, the whole coloring down to the same tone that it was hard to believe that some hundreds of years had intervened between the building of the old part and the new.

Robert Herne came out of the porch, letting the heavy, iron-clamped, oaken door clang behind him just as the entire circle of the sun appeared above the downs, flooding the meadows and the undulating turfy country beyond in one moment with a sheet of golden light, and throwing the long wavering shadows of the trees far beyond them on the dewy, daisied grass. A light breeze was stirring among their upper branches, and above the sky was of a very pale blue, mottled with tiny clouds, greyish-lilac on the western horizon, but gradually growing warmer and softer in tint till they merged into a rosy, delicate pink over the zenith. Robert glanced up at them, and then strolled down the garden, and thence to the end of the afore-mentioned meadow, where he rested his arms on the top of the gate, and looked about him. In front, to the south and east, there was not much to see, nothing but the white little-traveled road, and beyond it sweep after sweep of grassy land, dotted over with sheep and cattle, broken here and there by an out-jutting rock, a clump of bushes or the flash of running water, and ever rising higher and higher until it ended in the table-like summit of the long range of downs, from which you could see the blue waters of the Channel sparkling

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far away like a line of light against the horizon on the farther side. Not a tree, or house, or sign of human habitation broke the still and lonely look of the view at that side: only a deep chalk cutting here and there in the hillside relieving what would otherwise have been too severe a monotony; but when Robert turned on his elbow and looked in the opposite direction the scene changed to a widely different one. The road wound downwards, and was occasionally hidden in clumps of trees; once it had to curl round a broad patch of marsh, golden-brown in color, and flecked with water-fowl, behind which two or three house-roofs and gable-ends, and sundry slender columns of pale blue smoke told of the vicinity of the pretty village of Merehatch, and beyond them again you could see the gleam of a white church-tower, relieved against a background of dark wood and purple, misty hills.

Not at anything in particular was Robert, or Robin, as he was more commonly called, looking just then. He knew by heart every inch of the landscape as far and much farther than he could see, many a year ago; but that quiet corner of the world in the early morning hours always had a greater attraction for him than at any other time; and at present he had just come home from Oxford, whither his father had consented to allow him to be sent to complete his education, because Alfred the Great was supposed to have founded that university; and it was therefore meet that a Herne should take his degree there.

Robin had not been long enough at Alma Mater to take his degree as yet; but going there at all had opened his mind to a wider grasp of the world in general than was shut in by those sunny southland downs, and home looked so much quieter, duller and more old-fashioned and homely than it had been used to do, that but for the knowledge that a couple of hours' ride across those green downs would take him to a lively, bustling seaport town, he would not, after three days of the long vacation, have been feeling enthusiastically

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grateful for the length of time which must yet elapse before he could return to the shades of Oriel's learned bower.

A step on the turf and a quiver of the gate on which he was leaning, made him start suddenly and look round. A tall girl of nineteen or twenty had joined him—a girl dressed in black, of countrified make, and fitting badly to her figure, which, though somewhat too broad shouldered, was both grand and well developed in its full curving lines, and with her black hair drooping heavily over her high forehead and brown cheeks, and gathered without any attempt at grace or prettiness into a coarse net at the back. She did not speak to him or say a word as she came up, making the gate creak and shiver as she leant with folded arms upon the top bar; and there was a clouded look in her great black eyes and on her heavy brow which brought the impolite expression from her brother.

"My goodness, Madge, how ugly you do look in mourning!"

"I wish you wouldn't call me Madge," she answered crossly, but without any apparent resentment at the speech itself. Robin laughed provokingly.

"*Moggye*, then! That's more Saxon still, I believe, isn't it?"

"Do let those beasts of Saxons alone," she rejoined wearily, and Robin laughed again, though with some vexation.

"I wonder what the fellows at Oxford would say if you called them beasts!"

"Better go back to them and ask. You say it often enough yourself."

"What a man of the world—what *I* say," said Robin, correcting himself as he caught a sort of a curl on his sister's lip, "isn't a rule for what young ladies should say."

"Then talk to the young ladies who don't say it, and let me alone."

"Come, Maggie, don't be so grumpy with a fellow,"

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said Robin, warmed into conciliation by the harshness of Margaret's tone. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, though it's enough to make anyone grumpy to have to go into mourning for a person one has never seen."

"Be consoled then, for you have seen her, unless, like kittens, you were born blind. Wasn't she one of your godmothers?"

"Very likely. How you quibble, Rob!"

"My dear, I am only trying to put you in a good humor. Come for a walk; we've got a couple of hours before breakfast. I don't know what made me get up so early."

"I got up because you woke me, stamping about in your room, and I couldn't go to sleep again. No, I can't go for a walk, I've not got my boots on."

"Put them on then. Do, like a good girl; it won't take you a minute."

"And I've hurt my foot."

"Oh! nonsense; when one excuse won't do you find another. Come along. It's not often I ask you, now; and we won't go far."

Margaret turned back to the house without making any reply; but Robin knew her ways well, and consequently when she reappeared booted and sun-bonneted, he had got on his hat and was waiting for her outside the gate. It was doubtful, however, whether the success of his prayer brought with it the anticipated pleasure. Margaret walked along beside him, it was true, but with lagging steps, compressed lips, and a whole air expressive of such complete unwillingness that Robin felt as though he had got a slave attached to him by a chain, and heartily regretted that he had not gone for his walk by himself. He tried chaff and jesting as usual for a time; but Margaret's dark face only grew darker and graver, and by-and-by he exclaimed:

"I do believe, Maggie, it's the prospect of this girl coming makes you so savage."

"We don't know that she is coming—*here*."

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"What did the governor say about the 'old Saxon rites of hospitality,' when he heard he and mother had been left her guardians?"

"Oh! that's nothing. She could go to school."

"I thought she was too old."

"I don't know; and anyhow, I'm sure I don't care where she goes."

"Don't you? I do. If she's a disagreeable monkey it'll make a very considerable difference to you and to me too while I'm here; as also, if the governor takes a dislike to her, which he's pretty sure to do, as she's both a so-called 'Norman,' and a real foreigner. I hate foreigners myself, for that matter, they're so disgustingly dirty; and don't the Spaniards feed on oil and garlic? Ugh! how she will perfume the place! Do have an extra big tub put in her room, Maggie. As for me, I think I shall beat a retreat before she comes. I can stand most things; but not a greasy, blackskinned ——" ("I dare say she's no darker than I am," put in Margaret;) "uncivil heathen. What language do you think she will speak—Chippewa Indian, or Spanish?"

"English probably, seeing that the Chippewas don't come from South but North America, and that both her parents were English."

"Pooh! her father was French. I've heard the dad say so a dozen times."

"Have it your own way. You always know less and pretend to know more than any one else in the house;" and Margaret shut up her lips, stuck out her chin, and went on. Robin shrugged his shoulders.

"Of all the disagreeable girls!" he said, lifting his eyes to heaven. "If the Chippewa's anything like you, home will be a pleasant place! I'm sure I wish I hadn't asked you to come out at all."

"I'd better go home then," said Margaret coolly.

"Pray do, if you like. I hate having a martyr dragging its stake at my heels."

Margaret turned at once without another word; and Robin walked on swiftly. Looking back however, af-

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ter a minute, he saw that his sister, now that she was left to herself, was limping along as if in actual pain, and stopping every now and then to rest. After a little while she sat down altogether, took off her boot and stocking, and appeared to be examining her feet. Robin felt uncomfortable. Then she got out her handkerchief, bound it over her ankle, and again set out homewards, carrying her boot and hose with her. Robin was almost on the brow of the downs; but, even without his Oxford chivalry, natural kindliness would have made him turn back. He darted after his sister, and caught up to her before she had got to the gate.

"Margaret! Why, Maggie, what's the matter? Your foot's bleeding. Have you hurt it?"

"Didn't I tell you so!"

"Yes, but not as if—I never thought—Poor old girl! I'm awfully sorry."

Margaret's dark face softened for a moment; but she limped on without a word in reply, and Robin, who had not seen the gentler expression, drew back muttering:

"Well, she might have *said* she was in pain. I do hate that sort of way."

Yet he might have been used to it by this time, Margaret never having been *any different* since her childhood, when, as a mere mite of five, or thereabout, she had suffered herself to be severely scolded and even punished for killing a pet parrot; never saying that the creature, in an excess of mischief or spite, had caught her ear in its beak while she was feeding it, and so bitten and torn it, that in her agony of pain she had dashed the bird from her against the stone fireplace, which coming in contact with *its* head had killed it on the spot. Margaret's left ear had remained scarred and mutilated unto this day; yet at the time when her mother came into the room and found her standing over the dead body, "and stamping on it," as Mrs. Herne said in explanation of her own unwonted severity, all the child would answer to exclamation or ques-

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tioning was: "Yes, I killed him. I'm not sorry at all. No, I'm not, I'm glad;" and when further pressed—"I did it a purpose. He bit me."

There was a tiny scratch inflicted during the struggle on one of her fingers; and Mrs. Herne, thinking it was the injury alluded to, was the more shocking at the vindictiveness which had exacted such terrible retaliation for so trifling a hurt, and gloried in the cruelty afterwards. Margaret was sternly reproached for having allowed her evil passions to get the better of her, was put on bread and water for the rest of the day, and given certain verses from Holy Writ to learn by heart.

It was not till she was being undressed for the night that the state of her ear was discovered; the heavy, uncurled masses of her black hair being then fairly glued to it by coagulated blood; and her nurse raised such an outcry at the sight, that both father and mother rushed to the nursery in alarm, and were fairly aghast at the view of the child's condition. Poor Mrs. Herne in especial—most tender hearted of women—became almost hysterical between loving pity and remorse; but Margaret turned away her little brown, bare shoulder from the loving arms which would fain have folded her to her mother's bosom, and glancing up at the Squire from under her sullen brows, said, in a voice broken by a sort of sob, which might have been either wrath or sorrow, between every word.

"Mother said — it — wasn't — nothing — *nothing at all;*" and would not even make a motion of her lips when Mrs. Herne tried to kiss and fondle her the last thing before she went to sleep.

Yet on the following day she seemed to have forgotten all about it, met her mother as usual, eat her breakfast cheerfully, and did her lessons with her wonted docile, if lifeless, regularity, and without even seeming to remember the previous day's incidents. It was Robin, who, coming home from the village where he went daily to learn Latin and arithmetic with the

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rector, found his sister with her face pressed against the perch of the defunct parrot, and her small arms clasped passionately round it, sobbing as if her very heart would break.

At his first word, however, she started away, pushing him from her when he would have *stopped* her, and escaped into the farm premises, where she managed to hide herself so well that she was not seen again till she walked in hungry, and self-composed as usual at supper-time.

If this was Margaret Herne, at five, little wonder Robin found her "ways" different to other girls at nineteen.

"Les ans nous developpent, ils ne nous changent point."

CHAPTER II.

"HERE'S a piece of work, father. I'm sure I don't know what's to be done about it," said Mrs. Herne as she came into the dining-room on the evening of the same day, where, supper being over, the Squire was leaning back in his big leathern arm-chair with the *Downshire Mercury* spread over his face to keep off the flies, and his wrinkled, sinewy hands peacefully folded on his stomach.

The one broad, latticed window which lit the apartment was open, and through the tangled boughs of honeysuckle laden with their pink and yellow clusters of scented *tusks*, and monthly roses all ablush with delicate, fleeting beauty, the low light of the setting sun streamed upon the old-fashioned room within; the walls painted brown and hung with dark family portraits; the wainscoting of oak reached one-third of the way to the ceiling, and broad enough at the top to make a convenient shelf, the heavy tables and chairs and huge mantelpiece also of oak, roughly carved and nearly black with age, the stone floor covered (much

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against the Squire's will) with a good thick Axminster carpet, equally ugly and serviceable; and the two tall book-cases filled with musty and dusty looking volumes chiefly bound in calf or *bona fide* leather. Over the fireplace hung a stag's head with branching antlers, two foxes' brushes, a pair of antiquated spurs and an equally antiquated pistol and cutlass. But besides these relics of the battle and hunting-field and the old pictures, there was not an attempt at ornament in the room, not a flower (though the roses and honeysuckle outside did their best to make amends for *that* by thrusting in long blossomy sprays and making the air sweet with fragrance), not a footstool or cane chair; or even a modern book or work-basket to lighten the dark solidity of the room, and give it an air of habitation; yet had it a comfortable look none the less, and the open window, with its view of flowery garden and sunlit meadow, gave it sufficient brightness for the moment without artificial adornments. Outside, on the terrace, Robin was lounging, enjoying his cigar, as was perceptible by the aroma wafted inwards on the breeze (the early Saxons not being addicted to smoking, Squire Herne forbade the indulgence *inside* his house), while Margaret was seated on a footstool near her father's knee busy with some coarse sewing.

Mrs. Herne's entrance woke the Squire up. A plump, comely-looking woman still, but with an air of heat and excitement about her at present which, combined with an open letter in her hand, made her husband exclaim:

"Why, *Moggy* woman, whatever's up with thee now? Zounds! but I wish we didn't live in these new-fangled days with penny posts and letters coming every five minutes of the day to upset one."

The neighboring village of Merehatch had but lately, be it remarked, been promoted to the dignity of two posts in the day, an innovation against which the Squire greatly rebelled, although, as it was seldom that more than three or four letters at most rambled down

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to Hernecroft in the course of a week, it could not be said to interfere materially with his comfort.

"What is it? No more bad news, I hope!" he went on testily.

"No, no, dearie!" said Mrs. Herne, seating herself and giving his hand a reassuring pat as she drew out her spectacles—"not exactly; it's only rather upsetting, for, of course, we didn't expect it so soon; though indeed I can't but be glad to see the poor child anyhow. It's a letter from Ellice."

"Eh, eh? the foreign wench? She was too cut up to write before, wasn't she? An' what does she say for herself? and is she going to leave that papist, slave-selling, what-you-may-call-it place?"

"She *has* left already. That's it," said Mrs. Herne.

"She says—stay, where is it? 'They think it better I should sail at once, as the shepherd and his wife are going home in the next steamer, and will be able to give an eye to me. It leaves the day after to-morrow; so I write by this to say you may expect me a day or so after receiving it.' See that now! and oddly enough came a note with it from Gordon, saying—there, read it, Marg'ret love, your eyes are better than mine."

DEAR AUNT:—(read Margaret), I had a telegraph yesterday from my cousin Ellice from Lisbon. She had arrived there well and safe, and may be expected to reach Southampton on Friday——

"And that's to-morrow, you know, father!" put in Mrs. Herne.

"Is that all he says?" asked Robin, who had come to the window during the discussion and was leaning on the sill, his cigar extinguished but still between his fingers.

"All but—'love to my uncle and cousin.' Father, I'm more than ever sorry you wouldn't have that boy here as Harry wished. It'll be downright awkward now Ellice Devereux is coming, and he her own flesh and blood."

"It was Harry Maxwell's own doing," said the

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Squire, frowning. "If he'd acted as a Saxon man should, his boy might ha' had bed an' board an' schoolin' wi' my own; but to go an' send him to a Jesuit College, an' then expect me to take him hot—aye, red-hot from there every summer, 'twas too much for any Christian to abide. For I don't suppose, Master Robin," turning to his son, "that even you'll say there were any *Jesuits* in England in the days of the Saxons?"

Robin laughed provokingly, and pretended to weigh the question.

"I don't know, father. I always thought there was something very jesuitical about that cute old Alfred putting on fiddler's dress and pretending to be everything sweet and harmless in order to worm a little knowledge out of his enemies. Nowadays we'd hang him up for a spy; but I suppose a little double-dealing and treachery was thought rather a fine thing in the days of the Saxon!"

"Don't you be impertinent, sir," said the father angrily. "Zounds! you're a nice young churl to sneer at your ancestors! Well, Moggy woman, if the wench is bound to come, come she must, for the present at all events; an' if she wants to see her cousin she can do so at her own relations' houses; but to my mind they'd be best apart now, by far. 'Tis a surprise to me, their corresponding."

"The telegram looks as if they were great friends," said Robin. "I wonder what he's like, by the way. I should rather like to see him. But, by Jove, Maggie! think of *two* Chippewas! We shouldn't be able to get the odor of train oil out of the house for next century if they were both here together."

"Father dear," said Mrs. Herne, with a sort of coaxing hesitation, "you know, though Gordon—poor boy! is a foreigner——"

"As the first Saxons were!" put in Robin mischievously; but his mother silenced him by an imploring frown, and went on.

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"His mother was English, and Ellice's mother too, and we musn't grub the child for her country."

"Eh? God forbid, poor little wench!" cried the Squire warmly; "'twould be no fault of hers, anyhow; an' she's but a child yet, and nat'rally she an' Madge 'll take to one another; an' then, nat'rally likewise, she'll do as Madge does. 'Tis all a matter o' habit and bringing up; and you can't expect a poor thing wi' a Norman father, and left to grow up in a heathen country, to be any better *than* a heathen when she is grown up. She's your own brother's niece, Moggy woman, an' you must train her, you must train her as the Saxon house-wives of old did the captive wenches that were brought them from the Danes. Where will you put her to lie?"

"At the bottom of the well, as truth is said to be found there, and may counter-balance the lying!" Robert put in *sotto voce* to his sister; but Margaret went on with her sewing without paying any attention, and Mrs. Herne, with an indulgent shake of her head at her son, answered:

"Well, I'd thought of the little room between Rob's and Maggie's. It's small, but there's no other on that floor, and I wouldn't like to put Amy's child in the attics."

"No, no," said the Squire readily. "The guest-chamber of old was aye rather of the better than the worse. Couldst not put the wenches together? Madge's chamber is large enow, an to spare."

"Maggie wouldn t like it, said Mrs. Herne, glancing at her daughter; and Margaret lifted her head with a short but emphatic "No."

"Maggie is prepared to go great lengths; but not quite so far as a sleeping partnership with the Chippewa," observed Robin, making a gesture of disgust. "Halloo! 'by the creeping of my thumbs something wicked this way comes. Mother, here's the parson's wife and Miss Pelter coming up the meadow."

"Dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Herne in a flutter; "it's

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very kind of them; but I've not got on my clean cap, and there's that room to clean out, and a hundred things to see to if the child's really coming."

"Let Madge help to clean it," said the Squire, looking at his daughter, who had not moved. "Why, lass thee don't seem to take much care for thy cousin's coming."

"No," said Margaret again, and lifting her black eyes to his.

"Heh! and why not? Doesn't want to have her here?"

"I don't care one way or the other," said Margaret.

"Tut, tut! that's all havers" (nonsense). "Ye cared enow when your mother proposed she should lie with you."

"She may have my room if she likes," Margaret answered quickly. "I'll take my things out of it this minute if you tell me; but I'd rather sleep in the granary than in the same room with a strange girl with nasty foreign ways."

After which last words, spoken with a vehemence which, coming on her previous quiescent indifference, quite startled her parents, she got up and marched out of the room, passing the visitors in the hall with a short ungracious salutation, and going upstairs, where she began to clear out the spare room with an energy which soon left nothing for her mother to do.

As for Robin, he had escaped beforehand, fearful lest he might be expected to assist in the entertainment of two ladies whom Mrs. Herne was then meeting with smiles and greetings, and conducting into the drawing-room, or "guest-parlor," as the Hernes called it, on the other side of the hall.

A quaint eighteenth century room this, set out with a primitive piano very high in the back, very long in the legs, and very much inlaid with brass about the body; furniture in faded, light blue damask, also long and spindly of leg, netted curtains, a circular mirror, so wavy on the surface as to distort your face into

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something horrible to see; a circular table primly adorned with a bowl of mutilated wax flowers under a glass shade, and two or three faded keepsakes, and annuals; on the mantelpiece a couple of huge Indian jars filled with peacock's feathers, and a really valuable Dresden china clock, much broken by the cleanings which successive over-zealous Mollys had insisted on bestowing on it; on the walls three portraits, one in sephia, of Mrs. Herne's father in a high-shouldered blue coat and much cambric frilling, and two in crayon, of Robert and Margaret—he a pretty, saucy, curly-headed child of four, she uncommonly like a negro baby partly washed out.

Into this state appartment, sacred to visitors and redolent of dried rose-leaves and lavender, Mrs. Herne now led her present guests—the Rector's wife, a matronly lady, rather worn and grey-haired, and clad in slightly dingy mourning, which yet did not prevent her from looking both the lady and the clergyman's wife all over, a type to which perhaps her air of mingled authority and harassment gave additional emphasis; and her friend, Miss Pelter, a faded, perky, antiquated-looking little old maid, admirably adapted both in dress and appearance to the furniture, with faint ringlets finished off with an attenuated knob like a door-handle behind, and shaded by a gipsy-hat securely tied down under her chin with broad green ribbons, a skirt of ancient and frequently-renovated brocaded silk—"It was my grandmother's, dear," Miss Pelter was wont to say, with her head on one side; "but still with a little altering and trimming, and turning, I manage to keep not *quite* behind the fashions;" and a tunic of green and white cambric, somewhat shrunk, and more faded still from repeated washings, and giving liberal glimpses of a pair of lean wrists, and a leaner, withered throat loosely encircled by a raggy lace handkerchief.

No greater contrast could perhaps be found than these two good ladies; but at present there was about

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them both an air of subdued excitement which made them kin — nothing vehement or unpleasant, but the sort of anticipatory eager manner peculiar to ladies in our more retired country parishes when there is something in the way of news to hear or tell; and the first greetings with their concomitant of due inquiries for the Squire and Rector were hardly over, before Mrs. Calthorpe began with:

"Well, Mrs. Herne, and is this all true we've been hearing? Part of it is, I see, and very sorry for it," nodding her head at Mrs. Herne's black gown. "It's a grievous dispensation to lose a relative at any time, even when we haven't seen him for a long while, though, 'whom the Lord chasteneth,' you know, 'He——' But what is this about a young Spanish lady coming to you? Your niece, I suppose, and we hear she's an enormous heiress, and all that sort of thing, where she has been living."

"And wears diamonds and emeralds *to* her breakfast," chimed in Miss Pelter. "They say your poor departed brother married an Eastern princess out—out *there;* and is it really a fact, now dear Mrs. Herne? La! but I remember him well, and a fine looking young man as ever I saw; though to think of his falling in luck's mouth that way——"

"Luck! Humph!" said Mrs. Calthorpe, cutting her friend short with little ceremony; "that's as opinions go, Teresa. Some men would rather marry a decent, well-bred, clean-skinned Englishwoman, and go without the diamonds and emeralds; but it will make a deal of change in your quiet house, Mrs. Herne. You will have to get extra servants, of course. Let me advise you *not* to let her keep her maid, even if she's brought one. The morality of foreign servants is too shocking. Dear me, I wonder almost that you or the Squire haven't been down to the Rectory to talk it over before; for I suppose you knew she would be left to you——"

"Why, dear heart!" broke in Mrs. Herne, an ut-

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terly bewildered look making blank her pleasant face, "there wasn't nothing to tell. I've only one brother, and he's alive and well at the present moment, thank God! and how all this has got about beats me altogether; for we only heard of Amy Devereux's death—(Amy Hollis that was, that lived over by Mitthing-under-Water—Ah! it was before your time, but *you'll* remember her, Miss Pelter, so often as she an' I used to be together before my brother married her sister at all.) No, we never heard she was gone to a better world, poor dear!—and a saint Amy always was, if there ever was one!—till Monday was a week; an' the only soul I've spoke to out of the house was Miss Gilling, who come to cut out and help make mine and Maggie's black gowns, and her I did tell, that we would have to be making ready for her daughter, dear child! if she decided to come home to us, an' I thought 'twould do her good to see we'd put on a bit of black for her mother, even if I wasn't always as fond of Amy as tho' she'd been my own sister; and for aught I knew, the child couldn't even speak English enough to understand us. . . But as to her being an heiress and all that! why, it's too ridiculous."

"Then it's not true!" asked Miss Pelter in deep disappointment. "La! how people can talk! Why Mrs. Simpkin's aunt told our Charlotte—but, dear Mrs. Herne, are you *sure*? And what about the rings of diamonds *and* emeralds to her breakfast?"

"Pshaw! Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Herne, a little impatiently for her—"begging *your* pardon, Miss Pelter, all the same—but true! Why Mr. Devereux, that was Harry's partner, never was rich, and neither of them of a saving turn, but let the silver run through their fingers as fast as they picked it up, and both their wives' money has mostly gone that gait, I fancy. As for Harry, I doubt if he'll ever come back to England now; and if Ellice Devereux (that's the girl, and his niece, not mine) has fifty pounds a year to keep her on, she's richer than I'd make her to be."

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"La! now, only fifty pounds! You don't say so!" cried Miss Pelter, who, having half as much again for her yearly income, considered herself a personage of independent means, and looked down on the lesser sum as something very contemptible. The mournful shake of her head, and emphatic clasp of her lean little mittened hands, spoke a world of pity for the poor girl who was left so destitute; but Mrs. Calthorpe was weighing all she had heard in her mind, and now, very quietly and judicially, as though worming the truth out of a deceptive Sunday-school scholar, she put in:

"But how then about the mother being a foreigner, and an Indian princess, Mrs. Herne?"

"She wasn't no such thing," said Mrs. Herne stoutly; "but an English girl born an' bred, an' a county woman o' my own—haven't I told you so? English! Why, she were the fairest, yellow-haired thing you ever saw, an' couldn't bide foreigners, or speak a word but her mother tongue; though the Squire, he do say that she chose a French husband because his name showed he had come from the Norman-French originally; and he took a down against her in consequence, as also against Harry's wife for turning a Romanist; but they two were my dearest friends—anyhow, Amy was; and if *Harry* had married *her*—but Emily's eyes took his fancy, though she was always the weaker of the two; and when they married, Amy went abroad with them and married that Mr. Devereux, his friend; so Ellice is English on both sides."

"You said yourself, though, I think, that she did not speak a word of English," said Mrs. Calthorpe still in the judicial and Sunday-school manner.

"That for aught I knew she mightn't," Mrs. Herne corrected. "Harry wrote me long ago, that they all spoke Spanish, or something of that sort, over there; but he was never much of a letter-writer; nor his wife either; and then, when she changed her religion, and when after her death, Gordon, their only child, was sent home to a Popish school, the Squire was so an-

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gered at it, he wouldn't let me write to Harry, nor any of 'em, for a rare long time; so 'twas quite a surprise to me, to hear from Amy one day, that she'd been left a widow some while back, an' was living with Harry, she an' her little girl, to keep house for him an' try an' hold him steady. Ah! dear, I'm feared he was never over much so, even when you remember him, Miss Pelter; but at any rate, he's been good to poor Amy and her child; and now that she's dead, an' Ellice left an orphan, the least we can do is to be good to her too; for it stands to reason he couldn't keep a young lass like her in that outlandish place; and him al'ays riding about the country. But as to what she's like, an' 'tis that I was coming to, I know no more than the babe unborn."

"We must hope she'll be a good companion for Marg'rit," said Mrs. Calthorpe; "foreigners often have a sort of polish about them which isn't bad in its way; though———but what a tall young woman Marg'rit is growing, to be sure, Mrs. Herne. It's time she saw a little more of the world to do her good. Her way with people is———"

"Not but it's anything but shyness, oh no," broke in Miss Pelter, nodding her ringleted head in a soothing manner from one to the other; "Mrs. Calthorpe doesn't mean that a bit; do, you dear? And indeed, I was terribly shy myself, as a little girl. You wouldn't think it, perhaps—he! he! he!—but I am still, and color up and go all of a tremble sometimes if only our dear Rector walks in rather suddenly. It's a most painful sensation, but some girls *can't* help it; they can't indeed."

"Oh! I don't deny it *may* be shyness," said Mrs. Calthorpe, with a world of doubt on the "may," "and in little girls it's often rather pretty and becoming; but Marg'rit is so tall and full grown that anybody'd take her for five years over her real age; and that sort of manner has a look as if she didn't *want* to be liked by people. I often wonder she doesn't take more after

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you or the Squire. He's just as pleasant as a man can be in general, which is always allowing that you let them take their own way first. I don't know any one my husband likes to have a chat with better."

"Maggie was never one for talking 'less she gets excited, an' then 'tis but a burst like for a minute," said Mrs. Herne; "an' she *is* shy, you're right there, Miss Teresa; it's just the living alone with us al'ays down here, an' never seeing anything or any one out o' the ordinary; an' less than ever since Robin went to college."

"But she might see them if she cared," said Mrs. Calthorpe, accepting for herself the position of being "out of the ordinary" as a matter of course. "I'm sure with all those boys of mine I'm never sorry to have a girl about me; and she might have taken a class in the school, or joined the choir. I asked her two years ago."

"Well, she thinks she wouldn't be much use at that sort o' thing," Mrs. Herne answered deprecatingly. "Not but I al'ays did both when me an' the Hollis girls were young; but if you've no taste that way—and then her father, he al'ays likes to have her about him of a Sunday."

"I'm always hearing that girls have no taste for this, and no taste for that," said Mrs. Calthorpe, unsoftened. "To my belief it just means their only taste is to do nothing, and let others slave for them! As for the Rector, I've no patience with him, encouraging them by those notions of his, and never looking at the result. I declare if the Duchess's daughter had red cheeks and a bad figure he'd want to take her out of the schoolroom, and set her down to a milkpail; but he's wild to get a harp of Giles Scrubbin's long-fingered, limpdobied girl, and dress her in white satin, and I don't know what not; and as for your Marg'rit, he declares she's a born gipsy, and it's out of place to see her with decent boots on, or sitting in church—'*Out of place*' to be in church! Do think of it; and he the clergyman of the

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parish! Ah! dear, it's a sad thing to be a wife sometimes; and I do wish we could afford to keep a curate; for the explaining him away to people alone is more than enough for one tongue."

"Mr. Calthorpe's an awful clever man," said Mrs. Herne placidly. "But as for Maggie, 'tis a wonder to me she's so black. She was a white enough babe when she was born, except for her eyes, which for that matter, mine aren't light, an' I nursed her myself eleven months an' a week over, an' never ailed a day all the time. But I don't know how it was; every time we put her in the tub o' night, her skin used to look a bit darker than it 'd done o' the morning; and when her hair grew, it come out as black as your boot from the first. Squire, he have thought 'twas along with my being frighted by a gipsy sort o' tramp when I was in the family way with her, and——"

Miss Pelter fluttered, and gave a little nervous cough. *Other* people might forget that she was, if not a girl exactly, yet a maiden, and therefore, presumably, ignorant of, and unfitted for hearing matronly experiences, more especially when connected with the earlier stages of babydom. Being on the very shadiest end of fifty, other people *were* apt to forget this at times; and therefore in due defence of her virginal delicacy, Miss Pelter always made a sort of protest in the form of a modest little cough, or general restlessness, not so *prononcee* as to check the conversation, and prevent her hearing any of the harmlessly exciting details which were as profoundly interesting to her as to the rest of a provincially feminine coterie; but sufficient to vindicate to herself the modest shrinkingness of one who had hardly yet ceased to speak of herself as a "girl."

"And so Miss Devereux comes to-morrow," said Mrs. Calthorpe, when the question of Margaret's darkness, and the gipsy, and what Mr. Daniels, the village doctor, had said, and what the monthly nurse had thought, had been discussed with a fullness which left nothing to be added. "How lone she will be feeling

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in a strange country! and will the Squire go to Southampton to meet her? I'm sure she ought to be grateful to you."

"Oh! as to that, her mother's relations would have taken her if we hadn't," Mrs. Herne answered. "But Amy wanted her to come to me: an' Harry, who's her other guardian, says the same. No, we'll send Robin to meet her. Where's the good o' going to Oxford if not to learn foreign languages? an' it'ud be death to the Squire to be set wi' any one belonging to him who couldn't even answer him in his own tongue."

CHAPTER III.

ROBIN accepted the commission in rather a doubtful spirit. Hernecroft was decidedly dull; and there was always something to see at Southampton; also the romance of going to find an unknown Spanish damsel would be very good fun, and give him something to talk about among his friends. Robin was but just three-and-twenty, and romance had as yet been scarce with him. He had fancied himself in love once or twice already, it is true, but more because other young fellows of his age were so than from natural sentiment; and of the heroines of his fancy, the first, a stout lady of mature years who, disguised in pink cotton fleshings and red-and-white paint, "did" the Columbine for a traveling circus, had disappeared from his ken and gone to fascinate the unwary youth in distant provinces five years ago; while the last, a stately creature in mourning, who lived about five miles from Oxford, and drove a pair of bay ponies, he had never spoken to, and had only once seen unveiled. But on the other hand, to have to pick out a strange woman on the deck of a ship, and claim her as your cousin—no, not even your cousin, but your cousin's cousin!—a foreign woman possibly ugly, probably pock-marked, or stiff, or unsa-

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vory, to be forced either to draw on his slender knowledge of French, or to converse with her by means of signs and gestures only; and under these circumstances to undertake a journey all alone with her. . . . No! it might be romantic; but "Dash it all! it was deucedly uncomfortable, you know;" and if an Oxford man of three-and-twenty could have owned to the existence of most undeniable "funk," Robin would have accepted the impeachment without delay, and cried off from the excursion. As it was, he went, but not happily; nor did his family assist him, Mrs. Herne being in a state of fuss and fidget enough to upset steadier nerves than her son's; while Margaret was sulky, and the Squire (easily disturbed, after the manner of mankind, by any little derangement in the household), irritable and captious, making believe to be prevented by something or some one from going as usual to his work of superintendence on the farm; and walking up and down the gravel outside the house, scolding the groom who was putting the horse into the dog-cart, scolding Margaret for taking no part in the general excitement. and grumbling at Robin for being so long "finifying himself like a Frenchified dandy," instead of being off and away to catch his train.

"I shall be too early for it as it is, sir," Robin said rather impatiently when he did at last make his appearance, looking certainly more "finified" and well brushed than usual, and wearing an odd expression of awkwardness and defiance, probably arising from a consciousness of the said toilet when viewed by the light of Margaret's scornful eyes and his father's strictures. "The train isn't due till 2.35; and you wouldn't have me go into a civilized place looking like a newly-caught Downshire savage, I suppose."

"If you call the people of your own shire savages, sir—" began the Squire irascibly, but Robin had already jumped into the dog-cart, his mother trotted up with fresh wraps and shawls for the traveler, and repeated injunctions to Robin to "roll her throat up

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well, for foreigners be so shivery-like at the best of times," and not to forget the sherry-flask, or to see that they both had a good meal before starting, till the Squire retreated, grumbling worse than ever, and Rob was glad to make haste to drive away and get out of hearing of all this fuss over the incoming stranger. He began to wonder sarcastically if *le jeu valiat la chandelle*, and to think less resentfully of Margaret's contemptuous indifference to the whole affair. The dissatisfied feeling grew and strengthened with every hundred yards of the road, till by the time that he reached the station and gave "Brown Bessie" and the dog-cart into the charge of an ostler from the inn to be put up until his return, he wished with all his heart that any other person but himself had been sent upon this errand.

* * * * * *

It was a lovely afternoon, one of those cloudlessly golden days which, let you be coming from the sunniest corner of the sunny South, would have made England look fair and lovely to your eyes; and very fair and very lovely indeed it looked in those of Ellice Devereux, though there was a dazzle of tears in their grey-blue depths as she stood leaning over the bulwarks, gazing out at the greenly-wooded slopes and snowy beach-lines of the Isle of Wight, as the good ship *La Plata* steamed her way through the blue Southampton Water to her long-looked-for anchorage. The deck was literally crowded with passengers and small articles of baggage, the latter lying about in every one's way; the former either darting from side to side, exclaiming, chattering, laughing and exchanging comments and farewells, or looking fixedly for the first glimpse of the docks, and the relatives—parted perhaps from them for years—whom they hoped to find awaiting them; but Ellice had been out of her cabin and on deck before any of them, so early indeed that the tumbling waves of the Channel were covered by a thick grey mist, through which she could barely see a

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line of bleak and rocky cliffs which one of the sailors pointed out to her as, "Yes, mum, there's England. Gettin' anigh 'er at last, you see."

England! Poor Ellice! she had read of the "snowy cliffs of Albion," the green fields and daisy-sprinkled lawns of her native land; but this black, barren rock and clammy fog after the sapphire waters of the Tagus, with Cintra's pale-green hill rising in the golden sunshine beyond, the last glimpse of land she had seen before the *La Plata* turned her bows finally homewards! The contrast was too painful. Her heart sank lower and lower than it had ever yet done during the thirty days' voyage, so long and lonely to the young orphan; and even when, in passing the Needles, the fog began to roll away and disappear before the rays of the sun, there was a weight on her spirits which not even the verdure of the Isle of Wight, with the Royal standard fluttering out bravely above the tree-tops sheltering Osborne, nor the gay yachts and crowded harbor, the brilliant sunshine and excitement all around her, could entirely dispel.

Since her earliest infancy, Ellice had been taught to love the land of her fathers, far beyond that of her birth, to call it "home," and think of it as "home," and look forward to returning to it as surely as a child to leaving school. Now, she was on its very threshold, the harbor was opening before her, in another half hour she would be on land; and in one and the same moment she felt that it was not home at all, but a strange land; that "home," *her* home, was thousands of miles away across the troubled ocean, and she nothing but a foreigner and an alien, the only one, perhaps, in all that crowded deck who had not even the hope of being met by a kindred face, and welcomed by a kindred voice; for her mother had left no near connections behind her, and those of her father's relations with whom any correspondence had been kept up were gay people traveling somewhere in France or Italy for the summer. She knew less about them by far than

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about Hernecroft and its inhabitants; but even these seemed to grow stranger and more distant now that she was in reality so near them; and when some one came up to her with a yellow envelope, saying, "Oh, Miss Devereux, here's a telegram for you. The pilot brought it on board; but no one knew where you were." Her eyes were so dazzled with tears that she could hardly make out the words within.

"*We have sent Robin to meet you, and bring you home. Your room all ready. All send love.*"

A kindly message in truth, coming straight from the kindly heart of Mrs. Herne, and falling like a caress on that of the poor, lonely child who read it. Her lips lost their pathetic, downward curve, and her two little hands clasped the piece of yellow paper to her as closely as though it had been the hand of a friend. Her whole face was illumined by a smile, wonderfully sweet and wistful, though nervous enough withal, as the steam-tug drew alongside, and among the people leaping on board she saw a young man whose face altered as it was, reminded her forcibly of the portrait of a chubby, dark-eyed little boy in her mother's album; and who was now asking in a manner half imperious, half embarrassed, for "Miss Devereux."

He was quite close to her as he spoke, standing in the gangway, but though his gaze was scanning eagerly the various groups of girls and women scattered over the deck, he never gave a second glance to the small, slight figure at his side, which in its plain black dress, and with a broad scarf of the same material thrown over the head and shoulders, looked to him like a nun of some order or another; and he started and stared like a fool for a moment when she put out a little timid hand and said:

"I am Ellice Devereux. Are you Robin?"

"*Miss Devereux!*" and he gave an incredulous gasp. "You don't say so! I took you for a Sister of Mercy. I beg your pardon, I am sure."

Ellice wondered why. There was nothing of the

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"Sister" about her, she thought, with the wind-rumpled locks of her soft fair hair lying about her face, and the handsome rings, too many and too handsome for an English girl of eighteen, sparkling on her tiny fingers. How could she guess that the perfectly plain black merino dress, with no vestige of white about it. and the mantle of the same sombre stuff draping her head and the upper part of her figure, after the manner of that worn by the Madonna in un-pre-Raphælite pictures, was in anywise different from the correct "deep mourning," with its paraphernalia of crape-flouncings and trimmings and tucks and bands proper to English ladies of the nineteenth century. It was what all Spanish women, high and low, wore in their first sorrow for some near relative; and Robin's face half puzzled, and half embarrassed, filled her with secret wonder.

He explained it afterwards, when, her luggage having been collected, and all the fuss and bother of landing at last achieved, they were walking up the streets to Bradley's Hotel, where he had been directed to get lunch for himself and his companion. Robin had been very desirous of putting her into a cab instead: but Ellice pleaded to the contrary.

"May not we walk? I should like it so much better; and the people on board said it was quite a little way. Do let me!" she said in that peculiarly clear yet soft voice with something between a foreign accent and a lisp in it, which had struck him at first, and he had not strength of mind to say "No;" his very aversion to being seen "walking with a nun," making him shy of suggesting any reason to the contrary. *Was* she a novice in any foreign order? he wondered. Novices wore white veils, though, and had their hair cut off; and if she were, how came she to have left her convent, and to have those little locks blowing about her brow like wisps of gold in the sunshine? and why, too, did she take such a very mundane, not to say child-like, interest in the people and things about her? A lively interest

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indeed! The young heart was beating almost to suffocation with a complication of feelings of which surprise and bewilderment were not the least, and the little black-veiled head kept turning from side to side, as the large eyes grew momentarily larger and rounder, till at last she broke out with a sort of gasp: "How very, very strange it seems! I have seen it all before, often; and yet I never could have imagined it. I cannot *feel* myself in it at all. It is only a sort of magnetic dream. How I wish I could wake up!"

"Spiritualist!" said Robin to himself, with anything but delight. "A South American spiritualist! I thought that sort of thing was confined to the Yankees. This is worse than I expected." Aloud he asked:

"What is so strange?"

"Why everything, the people, all the *common* people in the streets speaking English like you and I, and all the names on the shops and advertisements—Look at that wall there?—in English too!"

"Why, of course they are, *in* England!" said Robin, half-laughing at the childishness of the remark as contrasted with the previous one, though annoyed too that he, an Oxford man, should be so much more shy and constrained than this strange little fair-haired, spiritualistic nun. "What else should they be?"

"Yes, but that does not make it *feel* less strange. You can't understand—Oh! there is a church, a *stone* church with ivy on it just like pictures and one's dreams! Cannot one go inside?"

"No, it will be shut. They are mostly all shut on week-days," said Robin, gently urging her on, for she had stopped and was gazing at the edifice with round, misty, worshipful eyes. Ellice sighed.

"*Que lastima!* but I remember it was so with the English chapel in Monte Video. It is a bad custom. The people should send up a petition to have it altered. Ah," with a change of voice and a merry laugh, "do look at those women! *Carramba!* what big feet they have! and how they all hobble! and why, why do they

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all hold up their dresses so high? *No es decente;* and the pavement is quite clean besides."

"It isn't always?" said Robin, scarce knowing whether to be amused or offended at her sudden jump from altering ecclesiastical arrangements, to the freedom of her strictures on his countrywomen. But Ellice hardly heeded him. Another subject had taken up her capricious attention.

"Why do they all stare so?" she asked in a half-whisper; "I don't mean the men (that is of course) but women too; and the children. See, those quite turned round to look at us."

"I suppose it is your dress," said Robin, rather revengefully pleased to explain. "Not that they would stare at *that* alone; but here young fellows like myself aren't in the habit of walking about with nuns of any sort; and then your hair——"

"Is my hair untidy?" asked Ellice quickly. "I dare say it is; for I packed up my dressing things before we anchored; and the wind was high coming on shore. But my dress—I don't understand. Certainly I am not a nun, nor dressed like one, except for being in black; and everywhere people wear black in mourning —no?"

"Yes, but it is that—that *thing* on your head," said Robin rather confusedly, though still bent on correction. "I assure you I thought you were a religious of some kind. Nobody but a nun would wear anything of the sort here, and they cut off all their hair or stuff it away somewhere. No one would stare at you if you had a bonnet on."

"But a bonnet in first mourning! Do you know how little a time it is?" and her voice fell with a sudden pathetic break, while there was a reproach in the innocent eyes which made Robin hasten to justify himself.

"Yes, I know; but every one wears a bonnet in England. They do, indeed. You won't see anything like this," touching the obnoxious scarf gently, "except

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our Sisters. Look about you, there are heaps of women in mourning, and smothered up to the eyes in crape; but——"

"Yes," said Ellice slowly, and with that slight hesitation in her speech, as though the right word did not come readily, which was apparent whenever she was not eager or excited. "I see. It is strange; but what can we do? I have no black bonnet or hat, indeed I have no bonnet at all; for when I did not wear the mantilla at home I wore a hat. I will tell you—could we not buy one? I do not like to have women staring at me; it is unpleasant and makes one uncomfortable —no?"

"More unpleasant than men doing the same?" asked Robin, opening his eyes as he mentally added the adjective "fastish!" to the others which were already crystallising round the image of the girl beside him. Ellice smiled with some superiority.

"Oh, one does not pay any attention to men; it is their way. They always do."

"By Jove! not unless they're cads; or the girl is—I beg your pardon, I don't know what South American manners are; but I should feel inclined to box any man's ears who stared impertinently at my sister."

"If you boxed a Spaniard's ears he would put a knife in you," said Ellice, as calmly as though she were mentioning the most every-day occurrence.

"What agreeable people Spaniards must be!" said Robin sarcastically. "But," with a sudden change of tone, "here is Bradley's, and I see some of your fellow-passengers going in at the door. Had we not better turn back and get your bonnet before having any lunch?"

His English *mauvaise honte* was quite too much for him to face the waiters and company in a large hotel with a pretty girl in nun's attire, and he felt grateful that Ellice, though both hungry and tired, yielded to his wish at once, and turned back to the street they had just quitted.

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How often in after years Robin remembered that bonnet-choosing! How frightfully awkward he felt when he first went into the shop and confronted the elegant young women of the establishment with his fair companion! How hard he tried not to look as if he had been convent-robbing, and to impress the facts of Ellice's foreign nationality on every one present; and how provokingly English Ellice *would* look when the heavy mantle was taken off her little blonde head; and with what easy composure she took the whole affair, selecting with an intuitive good taste which relieved him, the one bonnet which happened to be at once the simplest and the most indubitably Parisian (N. B. It was the "French pattern," and cost double the price of any other in the shop: but neither of the young people were well up in the relative prices of such adornments), holding up her face to Robin that he might "see how it looked" after it was on, as though she had known him for years; and paying for it with a little furrow in her brow over the calculations between English sovereigns and Spanish dollars, which ended in her emptying the little velvet purse she carried hanging from her wrist on to the counter, and begging the young person in attendance to take what was *just* from the mixed assemblage of coins, English, Spanish, and Portuguese, which lay before her.

How often Ellice, too, in those same years to come, remembered her first purchase in England, with all the other incidents of that memorable day! The quaint, clean, sunny little town, with its ancient gateway of the Bar, and the blue Southampton Water glittering in the sunbeams, and crowded with boats and shipping of all sorts and sizes; the coffee-room, whose ceiling seemed so low and window so small, that she felt as if she were in a gaudily-papered box, and where she stood gazing out at the busy groups crossing and re-crossing outside, all with that odd look, half familiar and half strange, as of something seen in dreams only, never in real life before; all speaking the mother tongue, of

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every other the least familiar to her in general life, the most connected with those whom she loved best, and should never see again in this world; the hasty luncheon which, when it came, she could hardly eat from excitement; the more hasty adieux to fellow-passengers till then mere casual acquaintances, but who, in this moment of parting, became friends dearer and closer than any others, as being the last links with the old life now being fast broken away from her for ever; the drive to the station, the bustle and scurry for tickets and luggage, the very real though unuttered terror at finding herself for the first time seated in a railway-carriage behind that terrible panting and steaming engine, and with no protection from the unknown dangers ahead but the young man seated in front of her, and who, though her guide and companion through the day, was perhaps the object least real and least thought of by her; the sudden shriek of departure as they rushed out of the station, town, harbor, Netley Abbey, and clustered masts all fast sinking away in the distance and disappearing, while green meadows, woods, and villages rushed up as fast, and were swallowed in the same manner, to give place to others; the sun, whose first beams at rising had glittered on the white decks of the *La Plata* and the tumbling waves about her bows, setting in a blood-red mist of fire behind a range of distant, purpled hills; bells that *sounded* like the "Angelus" from the little *pueblo capilla* of Santa Maria del Pillar; and then—a mist before her eyes, a great, choking lump in her throat, and a sudden, shivering start and gasp for breath, as though roughly awakened from a long, long dream, as the small face was hidden among the cushions with a smothered sob.

"*Home*, mother's home!" and *no* mother, no uncle or Gordon; no one belonging to her, but this strange young man; and she a strange girl in a strange place, with all her life before her!

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CHAPTER IV.

ROBIN was down earlier than usual on the morning following Miss Devereux's arrival at the Croft; and the first thing he did on issuing from the house-porch was to go round to the side of the wall in which Margaret's window was situated and *chuck* a handful of gravel at it by way of summons to his sister to join him.

Truth to say, he felt in need of any one, even a person usually so unsympathetic and uncommunicative as Margaret, to exchange opinions and surmises with on the new arrival.

For just as little as Ellice comprehended him, the compound of half-kindly, half-disapproving amusement in his manner, the sharpness of speech which almost seemed to her want of courtesy, and shy embarrassment natural in a young Englishman reared between Hernecroft and college and very little used to women's society of any sort; so little did he understand *her*—her utter want of bashfulness or constraint, and yet (and the absence was quite as marked) of any particular *empressement* in his favor; the familiar English phrases and foreign accent; the gliding steps and little gestures of hand and head which almost seemed like affectation, with a very child-like *naivete* of speech; her evident capability of an accustomedness to acting for and taking care of herself, with her equally evident terror at many things which seemed ludicrously commonplace and simple to him; the odd, almost *hazarde* observation coming out now and then in the softest of girlish voices; the silent, wistful sadness gradually creeping over eyes and brow and mouth as they went skimming along the line on the way for home, and then the hidden face and trembling shoulder when he knew that she was weeping, and yet could not guess sufficiently at the reason to hazard consolation or sympathy.

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There was a great fund of tenderness and sympathy underlying Robin's saucy face and sharp sayings, a warmth of heart drawn straight from the mother who gave him birth; and every spark of criticism departed from him at the sight of the girl's grief. He would have given anything to say something to her by way of comfort; and yet he knew so little of her, she was so strange to him in every way, that not a word could he find for the life of him; and poor little Ellice, only too thankful for his silence, and hoping from it that he might not be aware of her weakness, cried on and on until her eyes were swollen and her head aching with exhaustion.

If only—if only some one else had been there! If Gordon, her own cousin and more than brother, the boy whose arms had almost to be loosened from her by force when he went away in the big steamer six years before, the tall, grave, blue-eyed lad with the tender voice which had never answered her sharply or found fault with her hair and dress; if *he* had but been suffered to meet her she might not have felt so lonely and deserted, but have had a kind arm to lean on, and a loving hand to dry the tears which in the mother country fell so fast for the mother heart now laid to rest beneath a marble slab in the English *campo sancto* in Monte Video. Robin Herne was merely a shade, not wholly unfamiliar as being an altered and manly copy of that old photograph in poor Mrs. Devereux's album; but otherwise a machine despatched for the purpose of transporting her to her new dwelling, and as little interesting as any other machine. Ah! if only fate had sent her Gordon instead, how happy—even in the irremediable sadness of this "coming home"—how happy she might have felt!

Her tears were all dried away, however, and her little face quite calm again, though very pale and grave when they arrived at the small country station where they were to get out: and Robin hurried her into the waiting-room while he went to look after the dog-cart,

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and then, shocked at her pallor and evident exhaustion, bestirred himself to find her a glass of wine and wrap her up snugly (for she was shivering with cold) in everything he could find before they started on their drive.

"*Gracias muchissimas!*" she said gratefully and forgetting for the moment where she was; but Robin guessed from the tone that she meant thanks, and feeling a very sympathetic tenderness for the small white face so weary and so near his shoulder, put out his disengaged hand and took hold of one of hers, saying kindly:

"I'm afraid it must be all awfully strange to you; but we are not many miles from home now; and you won't forget that it's *your* home too, and that mother and Maggie and all of us are only waiting to make you welcome and happy."

"You are very good to me. Thank you," said Ellice rather shakily; but Robin felt the small cold fingers close with a grateful touch upon his own, and knew his eloquence had not been thrown away. He did not remove his hand, though no other word was spoken for a moment or two, until Ellice suddenly drew it away exclaiming, "The *Hawk Tower!* Oh! the Hawk Tower! There it is."

"Why! how *did* you know?" cried Robin, following in huge amazement the direction of her hand as she pointed to a square ruined tower standing out dark and grim against the yellow evening light on the brow of a neighboring hill.

"Mother!" was all Ellice said, but the quivering lip added much more: and though she leant forward eagerly scanning every step of the way now as if she knew it all by heart, she said nothing beyond, and Robin thought her sleepy or preoccupied by the monosyllabic replies he received in exchange for his remarks on the general points of interest in the country they were passing through. He felt glad when the lighted windows of the Croft began to glimmer through the

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trees, and still more glad that Ellice was, as he mentally phrased it, "bonneted like a Christian;" for what his father would have said to the Scriptural-looking mantle he did not like to imagine.

Their wheels had been heard. Probably several had been on the watch for them; for there was a little group assembled in the stone porch as they drove up, Mrs. Herne foremost, her comely figure pleasantly revealed against the ruddy lamplight of the hall, and behind her two of the maids, while the stable boy waited near, ready to take the horse.

"There is the mother," Robin had just time to say in the cheeriest voice he could assume; and then Ellice was lifted down and taken forthwith in two plump and motherly arms and kissed and welcomed with a warmth which brought tears into her eyes, before being led into the dining-room where the Squire was standing ready to receive her with a little speech, somewhat formal and overladen with Saxon phrases, but accompanied by a kiss (a rare performance with the old gentleman) on her forehead, which she took with her customary soft "Thank you," but with downcast lashes and a face whiter, Robin thought, than any snowdrop.

Margaret was not in the room.

Her absence, however, was immediately remarked, and she was sent for peremptorily by her father, whose ideas of hospitality did not admit of any member of the family absenting themselves from the reception of a guest. And here a little *contretemps* occured; for Margaret came in carrying her head high and with her usual unwilling step, and put out her hand very stiffly, while Ellice rose quickly and going forward lifted up her face, kissing her on one cheek, and making as though she would have done so on the other, if Margaret had not prevented her by a rough backward movement of the head.

The repulse was too decided to escape notice, for Ellice was so small that she had to raise herself on tip-

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toe to reach the Downshire girl's lofty head; and the jerk almost threw her off her balance. Robin started, and his face grew crimson with indignation; and Mrs. Herne uttered an appealing "Maggie, *love!*" but fortunately the Squire had not seen it, and Ellice drew back at once with trembling lips and a scarlet spot in either cheek. Margaret had offered her a gross insult; for the foreign kiss on both sides of the face was to the foreign girl nothing more than a shake of the hand with us; and to refuse the one equally offensive as to refuse the other. Yet, after the first start of mortification and stung feeling, she felt no anger. She had done nothing to merit the slight; therefore it could cast no odium on *her*. She felt sorry for the girl's ill breeding, that was all; and sorrier because the first glimpse of Margaret's swarthy skin and black hair and eyes had reminded her quickly and warmly of the dark-browed daughters of the South among whom her life had been passed.

As for the squire, his amazement at her own appearance was something ludicrous.

"Why, Moggy woman, the maid is *white!*" he exclaimed, as soon as Ellice's new bonnet had been removed; and even after supper was over, and Mrs. Herne, compassionating the young stranger's heavy eyes and weary fadedness of lips and cheek, had carried her off to bed, the old gentleman recurred again and again to the subject as he sat over the table with his son, discussing the events of the day with him.

"Well, well the world's coming to a nice pass. Zounds! but the end on't must needs be nigh at hand. To think of a maid born of Norman parentage and reared among black heathens, coming out of it as white as a sack o' bean-flour, while my own lass, a chil do' my very flesh an' blood looks for all the world like a gipsy woman's stray. Eh! but these are queer days we're living in, Robin man! An' to hear her talk! Why, she speaks her Saxon tongue as well as thou dost,

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saving the bit of a lisp which I doubtn't 'll wear off as she grows up a bit."

"I hope not; it's too pretty," said Robin laughing, but the Squire shook his head.

"Nay, nay, lad. Lisps be well enow for babes an' sucklings, but this young wench is almost past sending to school, eh, Maggie? Why, where is the lass?"

But Margaret had taken herself off to bed also; probably to escape the discussion on the subject of the new arrival, and was seen no more by any one.

* * * * * *

Robin had some time to wait before his sister obeyed his summons. When she did appear, however, her toilet gave evident proof of having been performed in a hurry, and there was an unwonted streak of color in her dark cheek which bore additional witness to the haste she had made; though, when Robin ungratefully greeted her with:

"Well, you *do* take an hour about getting down!" all she answered was:

"What matter if I do!" and turning from him, swung herself up on to the heavy gate on which he had been leaning, and resting her head against the trunk of a great tree which grew beside it, gazed listlessly out over the country as though her coming had nothing to do with him or with his summons. Poor Robin, however, with his more social disposition, was dying for some one with whom to discuss his past day's experience, and thought it wise, therefore, to adopt a different tone. Accordingly he took a seat on the gate also, balancing himself astride on it, as he asked cheerfully:

"Well, Margaret, and what do you think of the 'Chippewa'?"

"What should I think after seeing her for less than an hour yesterday evening?" she answered, not moving her head or eyes from their averted position.

"You saw what she was like, at any rate," Robin persisted, and wishing people would look at him when

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they spoke; "by George! I *was* taken by surprise when I first caught sight of her; that bit of a fair-haired thing, with her little soft face and blue eyes, all done up in pieces of black stuff, for all the world like a Sister of Mercy. She reminded me of Tennyson's 'St. Agnes'—don't you know it? or the little novice in the 'Idylls' when she couldn't understand Guinevere. She had just that look, half-timid, half-eager, when I first saw her."

"You poetical people have fine imaginations," said Margaret coldly. "'St. Agnes' in a fashionable bonnet and high-heeled boots! You must be mad, Robin."

"I might be, only that she didn't happen to have on the fashionable bonnet; and as she doesn't wear her dresses cut half way between her knees and ankles like you, my dear, I couldn't see her boots, whatever they were," Robin retorted rather warmly. "She had that scarf thing pinned over her head, I tell you. Why, I had to persuade her into buying the bonnet, and putting it on, before I dared face the hotel people."

"How cruel of you! Spoiling the sensational effect. I suppose it was meant for what they call a mantilla; though I remember Uncle Harry's wife writing to mamma that she always wore a lilac sun-bonnet out at the sheep farm; but *that* wouldn't have looked poetical and Spanish enough for a first arrival, depend on it."

"Nor do people wear lilac sun-bonnets in public, or in deep mourning," returned Robin, still more vexedly. "That scarf is the correct thing, it seems, for mourning out there. By the way, too, I doubt if you'd show in a sun-bonnet at Southampton, though it might improve your complexion if you did so here."

"I suppose you'd like my skin to be like Miss Devereux's!"

"Why not? If she had a little more color, and just a trifle of——"

"Oh! *if* the Queen of the Sandwich Islands had rosy cheeks and a lily brow!—Don't begin with 'ifs,'

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Robin, or you could make an angel out of the veriest clod."

"I'm not going to do so. Now I think of it, I doubt if a color would become her. That soft, waxy skin, with the peculiar tint of hair and eyes, is like the girls in Leslie's pictures. But women never admire one another. I forgot that, and awfully petty it is of them, too. I wonder *you* aren't above that sort of thing."

"I don't pretend to be above anything common to girls in general."

"Girls in general try to make themselves a little pleasant if they can. I wish you'd not be above that."

"Perhaps *I* can't."

"You can be civil, at any rate. Upon my word, Margaret, you made me positively red, red with shame, when you were so—so rude as to refuse to kiss that girl. It was worse than ill-bred—un———"

"I did not *refuse* to kiss her. Of course, I don't kiss strangers. Who does? I was going to shake hands with her when she kissed me on my cheek!" and Margaret put up one hand to the place as if it still tingled at the recollection. "Very forward it was of her, too. I can't endure gushing, and I thought you couldn't either, especially among people who don't know one another."

"No more I can; but as to the kissing on both cheeks it's a foreign custom. If you had read a little more you'd have remembered that for yourself."

"Very likely; but I'm not going to take up every nasty foreign custom because we have a foreigner in the house."

"I think you can hardly call her a foreigner or a stranger either, seeing who she is. Why, she's far more English-looking than you, and speaks the language as purely as——"

"I think she speaks very affectedly. Now, you needn't fly out, Robin. I don't say that she *is* affected; but that her accent and manner are. I suppose, as you

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say, it is only foreign; but I thought," and Margaret spoke rather pathetically, "that last night you disliked foreign things and ways as much as I do."

"I hope I am not such a pig-headed brute," said Robin, reddening somewhat confusedly, though he tried to speak with superior dignity, "as to dislike a poor little orphan girl only because she happens to have been born out of England. The fact is, my dear, you are terribly narrow-minded. I don't blame you for it. It is the always living in this dead-alive, out-of-the-way place; but——"

"Then take me out of it," cried Margaret, suddenly waking out of the apathetic gloom with which she had been speaking till then, and stretching out her arms with a fierce passion of intensity almost terrible in so young and ordinarily self-repressed a girl. "Take me away! You go yourself. You see life, and men, and live, and enjoy them, and then come back to sneer at and triumph over me. You go out into the wide world, and breathe, and see, and *do*, and leave me to *stagnate* in this dreary *stagnation*, and then mock at me and tell me I am 'narrow-minded.' . . Narrow-minded!" and the girl lifted up her long, sunburnt hand, the fingers interlaced and twisted in each other almost to bruising in her desperation. "I wish I had *no* mind. I wish I were dead or buried. I might as well be all as here."

"Margaret! Why, Madge old girl, what's come over you?" cried Robin, half wondering, half soothingly. In his heart the thought had risen. "Surely there must be a screw loose in Margaret's head. What an awful thing if there is!" but at the first sound of his voice, the dull patch of scarlet which had risen to Margaret's cheeks faded out, her hands dropped down into her lap, her head went back into its old position against the tree-trunk; and he was glad of the need for changing the subject afforded by the sudden view of a little black-frocked figure coming slowly to meet them across the meadow.

"Why, there's our small Spaniard!" he exclaimed,

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springing lightly from his perch, his face brightening at the opportune relief. "See now, Maggie, *dosen't* she look pretty, gliding through that patch of feathery grass between the shadows of the tree-trunks? What a picture she would make just so, in her close-fitting black gown, with the sunlight on her little head, and the two white flakes of hands holding that big bunch of crimson flowers against her breast, and the daisies and meadow-sweet, making a sea of pale foamy color about her feet! Come along and meet her, there's a good girl!"

But Margaret's brow had darkened ominously, and she turned her head in the opposite direction, with the impatient exclamation:

"*That* girl! I suppose it will always be so now, spoiling every comfortable talk!"

It was on Robin's lips to say that her idea of a "comfortable talk" differed materially from his; but Ellice was nearing them, and for her sake he was anxious not to aggravate his sister more than was needful.

He said nothing, but went hurriedly forward to meet the visitor.

Ellice had lifted her face and was smiling—a look half wistful, half friendly in the up-gazing eyes, which seemed blue under the morning sky as they had seemed grey in the lamplight; her head was uncovered, and the fair hair round which the sunbeams made a golden halo was woven into one thick plait, which fell to her waist behind, and was tied with a broad black ribbon. Only round the broad, child-like brow, sundry little, loose locks, fine and soft as floss silk, were curling and blowing in the sunshine breeze as she passed in and out among the arching trees and through the whitened waves of feather grass and meadow-sweet. Putting out one hand to greet him, she said, before he had time to speak:

"Have I disturbed you? I could not help coming out to look at the morning. Everything looked so beautiful from my window; and then I caught sight of

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you two, and your sister beckoning. She *was* beckoning to me—no?"

"I don't think she saw you," said Robin amusedly, conscious of how very different Margaret's desires had been, and afraid to look round lest he should see her maintaining her sullen position. As a fact, she had got down, and was standing awaiting their approach. "We were fighting. It is a little way of ours, and gives us an appetite for our breakfast; but I am very glad you did come out. How good of you to get up so early after your long journey; and how did you sleep?"

"Beautifully when I slept at all. The world seemed all too new and strange at first. There did not seem room for sleep in my head with all the other things it had to hold; but I was so comfortable, my tiredness got the better of me at last."

"Margaret will be glad to hear that," said Robin, speaking purposely louder that his sister might hear, "for she was very busy yesterday afternoon in getting your room ready. Maggie, Miss Devereux says you made her very comfortable," and he wheeled round, infinitely relieved at finding his sister close at his back; though she only put on her hand very stiffly; and said "Good-morning," without even the glimmer of a smile to soften the sombre moulding on her face.

Ellice smiled and said "Good-morning," too. She had a very sweet smile which came and went, touching the corners of her mouth and brightening in her eyes whenever she spoke; but she looked chilled, and was careful not to offer the salute which had been so roughly repulsed yesterday. There was a faintly-puzzled line between her brows as she looked up at the English girl and said:

"Thank you for taking so much trouble. You are all very good to me."

"*I* didn't take any trouble for you," said Margaret shortly. "I always help mother in the house arrangements when I'm told to do so. I expect it is nearly break-fast time now, Robin, we had better go in; and

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she turned abruptly away, and went off at a long, swinging pace, with her head bent, and arms hanging at her side, and a long trampled track behind her feet. Robin set his teeth together, muttered something, fortunately inaudible, and turning quickly to Ellice, proposed that he should show her the gardens.

"It wants three quarters of an hour to breakfast-time yet," he said lightly. "Plenty of time to make acquaintance with a patch of ground like this. I wish there were anything better to show you than turnips and cabbage, roses and rick-yards. If we were only at Oxford now; sten—ah, you ought to go there some day, Miss Devereux; I should have something to show you there."

"Better than *this?*" said Ellice, turning her head that her shining eyes might travel softly over the verdant meadows and sun-engoldened downs. "Oxford must be grand, and I should like to see it some day very much; but better than this? No, *'por cierto.' I* cannot think that."

CHAPTER V.

HERNECROFT, July 2d, 187—.

"MY DEAREST GORDON,

At last I can sit down to begin a real and long letter to you. How glad I was to get yours the day after I arrived! and how like you to know I would be glad, and send it! It was just like a breath of home in this odd country which seemed so familiar when I had never seen it, and so strange and foreign now. Gordon, Gordon! if you were only with me, I think it would grow familiar again; for here are all the old places which our mothers used never to tire of talking about; and the Croft itself and the Hawk Tower, and the village of Merehatch are exactly like the little sketches in auntie's old book, and different in nothing

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from what we used to imagine, except that then, if you remember, we used to fancy that the greens in the pictures must be exaggerated, and the blues faded; but no, I see they were all right. Did you ever think grass *could* be as green as in England, or skies as pale? I watched the blue beginning to fade about a week after we came on this side of the equator, and every day it seemed as if a wet brush had been passed over them, taking off an extra tint of color at each sweep. Now, I understand why in books so much stress is laid on the 'blue Italian skies;' but surely they are not brighter than ours? You will know, for you have been in Italy, and talk more of it than of England in your letters.

"And yet, Gordon, pale as the skies are, I can't fancy anything much more lovely than this little island home of ours; the millions and millions of tiny wild flowers, so many sweet smelling, and lasting *all day* instead of being withered up and killed by the noon-day sun. And then the green hedges and lanes and lovely old cottage covered with ivy or roses, and thatched and moss-grown: as different from our mud *ranchos* with their shuttered holes of windows and no floor or chimney, and nothing but their little patch of Indian corn behind its prickly aloe hedge to break the sun-baked waste around them, as light is from darkness. But it is this beautiful juicy grass that one can positively *sit* and lie on without any fear of snakes or '*bichos*' of any sort that takes my fancy most. In fact, beyond a few wasps from the orchard, and a *few* flies (about which they make as much fuss as though there were a plague of them), there don't seem to be any insects hereabouts. Do you remember all our many-legged enemies in Uruguay, the regiments of centipedes which used to walk over the white-washed walls of the *estancia* (sheep farm), the clouds of mosquitoes, and blacker clouds of flies which *would* settle all over doors and windows and books and papers, and line the edges of our soup-plates, and stick in myriads over the puddings?

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vate pots of peach '*dulce*' for me because she said it wasn't quite so sure how *I* would fare in the next world, and therefore it was only fair I should be made more of in this! Why do they not carry out the same rule with you?

"But you want to know how I like them all at Hernecroft, what they are like, and if they are kind to me. Is it not rather difficult to say in so short a time? If I had my water-colors here I would sketch them all for you; but you have their photos, and the Squire and Mrs. Herne are very little changed since theirs were sent out. They are both very kind to me; though he speaks in a rough, loud voice as if he were angry even when he is not in reality, talks about the Saxons as if they were his own especial property, and uses odd old-fashioned expressions, all of which combined made me think he was a little mad at first. As for her, she is very—'dear' (there is no other word for her), and exactly what poor mamma and Aunt Emily used to describe; only that she has grown older and fatter, and fusses about a good deal till one feels quite warm only to look at her. Her round, crumply face is eminently motherly and 'kissable,' and she never passes me without a nod or a smile or a little caressing pat. I feel as if I should love her with all my heart.

"Robin is rather like her, though not at all good-looking. He is at Oxford, and I think he is clever; for his room is full of books and papers, readable-looking books which I long to get at and devour, though nobody else ever seems to open them. He says sharp things too; and both the Squire and his mother seem to admire him very much, and think a great deal of his talents. *He* thinks a good deal of them himself. Indeed he seems to consider himself the only civilized person in the house, and rather makes little of his family, which is a pity, as, but for that, he seems good-natured enough, and rather nice. He seems to have very little to do, however, and to find his home very dull and I think he is not sorry to have me to amuse

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and patronize; for he treats me alternately as if I were some wild Indian princess, and a small child. Still I like him, and shall be sorry when he goes. Of course he is not *you;* but he is the most companionable person in the house for me; and I fancy we shall grow into real friends when we get more used to one another.

"As for Margaret, I would rather say nothing about her, for——Oh! Gordon, I *don't* like her. I don't like her at all; and she does not like me. She is very difficult to understand; but there is no misunderstanding that. And yet I am sorry for her, for she does not seem at all happy. She seems fond of nobody, and nobody is fond of her; and if it is possible for a mother to be afraid of her own child, I should say Mrs. Herne was even a little afraid of her. Yet I do not know how it is; for she speaks very little, never flies into a passion, or scolds, or objects to anything that she is told to do. But she goes about her work with such unsmiling grimness, and has a way of sitting silent for hours without ever lifting her great, sombre eyes; or stalking off for long solitary rambles among the hills just when you are wanting to be companionable with her, which is very uncheering to a stranger like me. She is very handsome, and I feel as if she were a girl who *could* do some great and noble deed, one who would have suffered herself to be tied to the stake in the old persecuting days, and burnt at a slow fire without uttering a moan or retracting an opinion. But nobody wants to persecute anybody nowadays; and——well, it irritates me to see a person *always* looking a martyr, who has neither the pains nor glories of martyrdom. Surely God *means* us to be happy; and if so, have we any right to spoil His meanings? Does it not vex Him, even as it vexes her mother when she spoils her fine face and figure by rumpled hair and slovenly, ill put on gowns?

"What have I to dress *for*?" she says, in that slow, cold voice which is like the 'drip, drip,' in wet weather on the marble '*patio*' at home; and I answer inwardly:

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"What for! Why, to give pleasure to those about you.' Perhaps she would ask what pleasure is for, if I were to say it aloud; but I do not dare; she frightens me, like all the rest, but Robin, too much for argument. He calls her 'Mad Margery,' and makes faces, and taps his forehead significantly even when she is present. I wish he would not; for I can't but think it hurts her; and I am sure she cares for him—not in your way or mine—but her own, more than she does for any one else; and he is very provoking, even to me, sometimes; though I would rather be left to his mercy than hers for all that. I will *tell* you a little incident which will explain what I mean.

"We were out in the field the first day after I arrived. Everything was so green and lovely I could do nothing but admire and wonder, and ask questions; and Robin got quite friendly, laughing at and answering me. Presently we came to a great hairyleaved plant with notched leaves. I had already my hands full of buttercups, which looked as if they were made of real gold, and many other flowers which Margaret called 'weeds,' and looked very contemptuous at my *picking;* and I asked Robin if he knew what that was.

"'That!' he said; 'why that's one of the rarest and most remarkable plants we have. Dear me! how extraordinary to find it growing here! Have you never seen it? It is called the *Netiliensis Ferocis*, and has the property of——'

'"Nonsense, Robin!' Margaret began in her rough way; 'Ellice knows what it is quite well only a——'

"'Margaret, hold your tongue. You're most awfully rude,' said Robin; and I added, being anxious to learn all I could of everything:

"'Indeed I do not know it. What were you going to say about it, Robin?'

"'I will pick you a piece and show you. Hold out your hand,' he said, and then before I knew what he was going to do, he struck me across the hand with the bunch he had picked. Gordon, it was like a

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thousand needles—red-hot needles too. I dropped all my flowers and cried out with the sudden pain; and as I did so Margaret burst out laughing. I had never, never heard her laugh before, and such a loud laugh, so harsh, and coarse, and long. It hurt me more than the sting of the plant, though (you know what my flesh is) the skin had turned scarlet and was covered with big white lumps in a moment. Robin sprang forward, his face full of concern.

"'Oh! Ellice' (he had called me Miss Devereux before), "I *am* sorry. I thought you would see it was a trick. I never thought you would hold your hand still. I am so vexed. What a brute you must think me! Will you forgive me? Fancy your not knowing a common *nettle!*' and he looked so sorry and vexed, I felt ashamed of having cried out; and laughed and told him not to mind, but to pick up my flowers for me; for it was my own stupidity. As for Margaret, after laughing till she was tired, and Robin looked quite angry, she stopped abruptly, said, 'Instead of making an absurd fuss about nothing, Rob, you'd better put some dockleaf on her hand,' and walked off.

"Now, of course it was Robin's trick; but I liked him better after it, and Margaret, who had nothing to do with it, less. Can you understand why?

"But I am wandering on and on, and all this while I have not asked any of the things I want to know about yourself, how your foot is, what you are doing, whether you are to have your own way, or to be a civil engineer after all; and what our Devereux cousins are like. You hardly ever speak of them, and yet you used to spend your holidays with them; and Lyle once wrote a charming letter to mamma. Write very soon to me, Gordon. Remember how *alone* I am in the midst of these stranger-friends and home-bred English. Remember how sick at heart I must often be when I am gayest, and how I want you, my own dearest cousin, and more than cousin.

Siempre a ti, with all love, ELLICE.

To Gordon Maxwell, Esq., 9 Friar's Court, Holborn, E. C."

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To this letter Ellice received the following answer by return of post.

"THE PRESBYTERY, 9, FRIARS COURT.

MY DEAR LITTLE ELLICE,

Your long letter reached me as I was starting to church yesterday evening, and I went on to the Viaduct afterwards to read it before going home. I was anxious to hear about you, and how you fare at Hernecroft. On the whole I am satisfied. I think that you are well there; better in many ways than you might be in other places; better certainly, for the present, than with Mrs. Devereux and Lyle.

"Keep a restful spirit, therefore, little one, and don't go striving to reach with one hand after the past and with the other at the unattainable, when, after all, it is only the actual present that you have to deal with, and the way in which you use that may influence your whole after-life. You know how gladly I would be with you; but since I *cannot* be, we must e'en make up our minds that it is better for you—perhaps for both of us—that it is not so. You will not think me cold for saying this. You know me too well for that; and while we can write to one another we shall do very well. Is it not a great step when you can get an answer in three days instead of three months?

"What you tell me about my father distressed me sorely; but you were quite right to tell it. You promised, and a promise *is* a sacred thing, not only between you and me, but in itself alone. If he would allow me to go back to him I would start to-morrow, even though I had to give up all my dearest hopes in life. I feel sure that, be things as they may, he could not be worse off for having his son at his side; but as you say he will not hear of it, or of *the other thing*.

"Therefore, as he is my father, and as (from what you and your mother have told me), I fear his affairs are not so prosperous but that my assistance may be absolutely needful some day, I must just put my heart s

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desire out of my sight for a time and work away with a will at the engineering. Mr. Caulfield told me yesterday that he was very well satisfied with me, which was cheering, for my evening's work has been so engrossing of late that I was afraid it had rather taken from the other.

"You know that I am living at present with our parish priests, who, having two spare rooms in the Presbytery, have taken me and another young fellow as boarders; and ever since the wheel of that omnibus went over my foot and lamed me, when I was trying to pick a small brat out of the way, I have had some of the lads from our night-school up here; and the experiment has turned out so successful that Father Lethwaite says he shall collect specimens and expect me to keep an evening a week for them. Some of them are very jolly fellows and wonderfully intelligent.

"Send me some of the wild flowers about you: as many varieties as you can. Put them in a card-board box with moss, or cotton-wool, and write me the local names, where you find them growing, and their exact tints; the last in case they should fade *en route*. There is a crippled lad of seventeen near here with the most rabid taste for botany, and we are studying it together. I wish I knew more of it than I do; but I find there is no better aid to learning than having to teach; and your Downshire wild flowers will be a great boon to him. Poor fellow! fancy, he has never seen a green field in his life, or gone beyond the court, where he inhabits a garret next the sky, while his old mother earns their living by selling oranges and walnuts at a stall in Holborn; and it is only on what he calls his "good" days that he is able to achieve a sitting position at all. Still, as he says, he might be worse off. There is a family of nine in the cellar of the same house, and three have opthalmia from damp and dirt and darkness. The garrets are preferable to that! However, I have heard of a convalescent home managed by the Little Sisters of the Poor somewhere in

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the country, and am trying to get the two youngest of these poor little, semi-blind children into it. It is difficult. Accommodation is limited with them, and funds scanty with me.

"Enough of my work, however. It is you I want to write about, and time for writing is slow to get and quick to go. Your sketch of the Hernes is better than it would have been in water-colors. It takes a very first rate artist to paint the *mind*. That is why I prefer landscapes as a rule. A man is only required to paint the outside face of things there; and the result is more satisfactory in general.

"You amuse me, though, you are so little changed from your old self, beginning by saying that you will not describe Margaret because you don't like her; and then giving her a description three times as long and as complete as any of the others. Nevertheless, I am glad of the contradiction, for I feel more interested in her than the rest. I cannot but imagine that the character you describe may be deeper and richer, whether for good or evil, than you fancy; and that if you were not in such a hurry to make up your mind that you dislike her, you might find her friendship as much worth winning as her brother's; and remedy the faults you observe in him by assisting to bring brother and sister more together. Every family is a circle; and the most opposite points only require a friendly curve to make them meet. *You* are one of the family now. Do not curve so strongly to Robin on the one side that you forget to take hold of Margaret's hand on the other. And try to forget the incident you mention: it was not pleasant, but might have been only country *gaucherie*, not malice after all.

"Now, good-bye. It is the hour for shutting up, and Jim, our hump-backed porter has come for my letter. God bless you, Ellice.

Your affectionate cousin,

GORDON.

To Miss Devereux,
Hernecroft, Downshire."

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I have given these letters because they show better than many descriptions something of the inner life of the writers. Between people who know each other intimately, sympathise with each other closely and love each other well, and yet who are separated for the greater part of their lives from one another, letters grow to be even a better and fuller expression of the lives of each than spoken words could be. This young man and woman, motherless both, and in the one case almost worse than fatherless, clung to one another with that double love, perhaps the most exquisite of any, of cousinship and friendship blended by mutual need and strengthened by mutual aid. Hereafter indeed that love might turn to pain and perplexity for both; *might* be a stumbling-block and a temptation to the man, a sorrow and an anxiety to the woman; might, by the mercy of God, triumph over trial and trouble, and become a crown and a blessing to either; but all this was as yet hidden in the "central sea" of the future, uncrystallised by any light of day, and some may wonder at being called on to wade through the epistles of a civil engineer's pupil with an eccentric craze for beggars and back slums; and of a little Anglo-Spanish girl taking in her first impressions of everyday life in a quiet Downshire farmhouse, far away from the gay world and the haunts of society.

CHAPTER VI.

"WE shall feel dull, shall we not, when Robin goes away?" said Ellice.

She was sitting on the bank by the roadside, with Margaret Herne standing near her twisting some wild poppies in the band of her black straw hat. This roadway was about midway up the downs along which it wound, and was deeply rutted and bordered on one side by fields of barley, now waving in long golden rip-

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ples beneath the August sun, and on the other by the open moor, its fresh June greenness burnt long ago to russet-brown, and only broken by clumps of sweet-scented, honey-colored gorse and ruddy stiff-backed heather, spreading the dry ground with a sheet of violet flame, over which the big, dusty-bodied bees, and butterflies, blue and white, kept up a ceaseless buzzing and fluttering.

It was very hot. The two girls had started on their walk with the avowed intention of getting to the highest ridge of the downs, and there refreshing themselves by an hour's inhaling of the cool, salt breeze from the distant ocean; but the way there was long and up-hill, and the sun beat so fiercely on Ellice's head, she was fain to cry for mercy before they had got halfway, and sit down under the tiny shade afforded by the low hedge fencing in the barley.

"You are a very bad walker," Margaret said in her rough, short way; and Ellice nodded acquiescently, "I know; but I am better than I was. Spanish women never walk—least of all in the sun. But it is worth while to rest here. How lovely it all is! and what myriads of flowers!"

She had picked a lapful already, and was leaning back in a very nest of others; the pale-blue succory with its large star-like blossoms fading almost as soon as picked; tufts of wild mignonette, gold and green; deep-veined mallows, lilac flushed with pink, and pink dashed with lilac; the graceful, feathery silver-leaf, bright as a plume for a fairy knight; the scabious, like a vulgar little tradesman, set so sturdily on its stiff, ungracious stalk, and staring upward with its round, hairy face, lavender or white; oxeye daisies, their snow-white petals radiating round the golden eye-like rays of a miniature sun; myriads of vetches with brilliant pink blossoms delicately streaked with crimson, wild thyme, and toad-flax, with its gold and primrose-colored flowers shaped like dragons' mouths, all growing about in the poor, dry soil of these upland re-

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gions, set in short grass and tangles of bryony, and framed in golden barley and the deep, cloudless blue of a midsummer sky.

Lovely, indeed! Below them stretched to the country, sloping ever slowly downwards, and only faintly apparent through the haze of heat which hung over wood and meadow and farm, and stretched away to the purple forests and hilltops in the distance. You could hardly see the great, duncolored Downshire cattle lying about in the meadows below, the fat, green meadows, through which the little willow-bordered river barely dragged a trickling existence, broken up here and there into solitary pools, divided by ridges of dried mud at the very season when it was most needed. Near them a rough, grey-backed donkey was feeding lazily among the gorse bushes; and far away one could hear a faint, solitary sound the "cling, cling" of a distant sheep-bell, or bark of a dog from some unseen cottage.

There was no human being within sight of the two girls, Ellice perched on the bank, her small white face and fair hair gleaming out from under the shelter of a huge straw hat; her black gown, filled with many-colored flowers, tucked up daintily to keep it out of the dust; and her delicate little feet, too lightly shod for Downshire rambles, resting on the roadway; and Margaret standing before her, her swart head bare to the rays of the sun till it seemed bronzing in the fervid light, her full, majestic figure grandly revealed against the sun-scorched glare of the road winding upwards and beyond them, and clad in a gown which, once violet and never fashionable, had become, by dint of rents, stains and fading, an indescribable blending of lilac and reddish-brown, a garment which most people would have pronounced only fit to be thrown away, but which an artist would have esteemed as a precious and picturesque "property," and would not have exchanged for the most graceful robe from the hands of Madame Elise.

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Some one, a man lying face downwards on the moor with a book beside him, but hidden from the girls' view by the flowering heather, almost gasped with admiration at the study afforded him by that single, upright figure, with its down-bent head and intertwined fingers fastening the bunch of poppies into the ribbon of her hat with such rough energy that many of the scarlet petals were torn out, and fell like drops of blood down the front of her gown and on to the dusty road. He muttered something like a curse when, at the same instant that he snatched up his sketch-book with the intention of transferring the "bit" to paper, Margaret, impatient of her ill success, tore out the flowers with a sudden, sullen gesture, and, putting the hat on her head again, sat down beside her companion.

"Oh! poor little things!" said Ellice reproachfully. "How could you have the heart to use them so! See here, I have got some more in my lap. Give me your hat, and I will put them in for you."

"No, thank you; they will only drop to pieces at once."

"Not if one handles them gently, and a bunch would look glorious against your dark hair. Let me."

"No, *thank* you."

The negative was shorter this time, and Ellice knew better than to say any more. During the two months that she had been at Hernecroft, the girls had grown to be friends after a fashion, such friends, namely, as the daily and hourly companionship of home life and the similarity of age must, apart from any other reason, inevitably make of two young women thrown together as these were. Ellice, to be sure, had another motive in her ruling desire to please Gordon Maxwell, and act up to his approbation, but, indeed, she was a creature with whom it was difficult not to grow friendly, so sunny was her own disposition, and so instinctively sympathetic with the dispositions of others.

She was quite as willing to give up a pleasant walk in order to drink tea with poor old Miss Pelter, and

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listen to the faded and worn-out stories of that spinster's faded and worn-out loves, as to allow herself to be beguiled into the Broad Church Rector's study and talked to by the hour on theological subjects, on the unifinations of East and West, and the uncomfortable obstinacy and pig-headedness of Rome; though, indeed, the Rector was even "broad" enough to assert (much to his wife's *scandalising*) that some good might actually be found seated on the Papal throne, or hidden under the shabby coat of a Dissenting Minister.

"It's their pertinacious assumption and churlishness that's the stumbling-block. If it were not for that, we might all be as comfortable as birds in an aviary," he would say cheerfully; "all different birds, if you will, my dear; but all singing away at their different songs in peace and happiness in the same golden cage."

"Only you have to *put* them into the cage first!" said Ellice wickedly; "and even in the most brilliant aviaries the birds are always squabbling with each other, and ready to fly out if the door is opened half an inch, you know;" at which piece of impertinence the Rector would laugh and shake his head at her, telling her, girls should not try their wits on theological subjects; and would not she like to hear the letter a friend of his had received from a learned Armenian doctor on the subject in question? It was a letter written in French, rather bad French, and it was very short and most polite and deferential; but it struck Ellice as having no definite meaning of any sort, and as conveying a general impression that the worthy doctor was equally unconscious of the meaning of the letter to which it was an answer; but all the same, nothing could be more courteous in tone and flowery in language; and it came from a *great* distance, and bore the postmark of a town so far removed from Western civilization as to be almost impossible to spell, and quite to pronounce after it had been spelt; and Mr. Calthorpe, one of the best men living, put it away with great respect and satisfaction, and spoke of the

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doctors of the Church in Armenia in every sermon for many weeks afterwards.

As for Mrs. Calthorpe, as soon as she found out that Ellice was neither a heathen nor a savage, she enlisted the girl for the Sunday-school and choir, and spoke much in the village of the pleasure of seeing a young person, reared in foreign countries, not only so "orthodox" (a phrase she generally used pretty equally in contradistinction to her husband and the two Miss Amadrews, ultra High Church young ladies from Thorley Hall), but a girl so gentle and willing to make herself of use: "such a contrast to Margaret Herne!'

"*Such* a contrast to Margaret!' so every one kept saying until the praise was even repeated to Ellice herself a breach of good taste very offensive to that young lady's mind.

"You should not say such things to me when I am living in her house," she answered, a glow of offended color in her ordinary pale face; "and when it is to her parents that I owe my pleasant home here, and everything I have! And you do not know how much goodness and devotion there is in her which no one guesses because she tries as hard to hide it as others might to let it be seen; and she is very kind to me, and often takes the worst of things herself in order that I may have the best, without saying a word. I am much more selfish. I *like* to be thanked and petted for what I do. You would think far more of Margaret than of me if she were not so careful to hide her amiable qualities, and pretend to be disagreeable."

"Possibly," said her friend, laughing; "though I assure you I cannot see any amiability in pretending to be unamiable; and as to your being selfish! I don't believe it. Nobody ever sees you anything but sweet-tempered and obliging."

"No one has ever seen my temper tried," Ellice answered, laughing too, though her color was still high. "There is no merit in being obliging when everybody is always trying to oblige *you*. Do not say this

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sort of thing or you will see me the reverse of sweet-tempered."

And she wrote about it to Gordon afterwards in her own confidential way, fearing that Margaret might be set against her by such comparisons; and yet with a girlish though unconscious gladness in the compliment to herself.

His answer was very short.

"Do your duty in the way most natural to you, and when it *is* done, don't waste your time in comparing the way in which you have done it, with the way in which Margaret does hers. By avoiding occasions of being put before her, and seeking those in which she can be made to shine, you will do her more service than by any amount of crying up her qualities and crying down your own. This advice comes from an older man than myself, and I certainly think it is good."

Anything Gordon said was sure to be good in Ellice's eyes; and as yet she and Margaret had managed to drive their separate teams in peace and concord.

Their amity came near a slight breach *to-day*.

* * * * * *

"Robin always goes away for part of the long vacation," said Margaret, in answer to the remark with which this chapter began. "He has some very gay friends at Scarborough; and last year he went to them much earlier than this. I don't know what he's hanging on here for, at present; for there is no place he hates like home."

It flashed across Ellice that only yesterday Robin had said to her:

"I wished I had not to go to those duffers at Scarborough. It is so jolly at the Croft since you came. You make the place so pleasant;" and a little color rose in her cheek as she answered Margaret:

"Oh! I don't think that of him."

"Because you don't know him," retorted Margaret. "He pretends not to be so bored when you are in the

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room, because you are a stranger; and part of the creed he has picked up at Oxford is to say civil things to women outside his family; but in reality he is frantic to escape. You should hear how he goes on to me about it."

The color flitted out of Ellice's cheek again, and her eyes fell. Margaret's plain speaking was not pleasant; but it was a question whether insincerity were perferable. *Was* Robin insincere? The idea pained her more than she would have liked to confess.

"Let us go on," she said, rising to her feet, and giving her head a little backward shake as though to dispel the sensation of discomfort creeping over her. "When we get to the top and catch the breeze we shall be able to triumph over your brother in a dusty railway carriage. What could he want at Boxminster on a day like this?',

"Amusement, which he can't find with us," said Margaret bitterly. "Didn't you see him yawning yesterday evening? I knew he'd be off somewhere to-day. Fortunate fellow that he is to be able to do it!"

"Well, according to my taste we have the best of the fortune to-day," said Ellice smiling. "It is as hot as South America; but you ought to find out something that *would* amuse him, Margaret, and then perhaps he would want to stay at home."

"If the game were worth the candle," retorted Miss Herne; "I'm sure *I* don't want him here."

"Now, that is just one of your Englishisms," said Ellice brightly. "I verily believe some of you think it wrong to be thought to care for one another! I am sure you do, however; and I believe you will miss Robin more than I shall when he goes."

"Very likely!" said Margaret with a sudden sharp look of surprise at the younger girl from under her sombre brows. "*I* am his sister. Of course he is a good deal more to me than to a mere acquaintance."

Again Ellice's sensitive little face flushed. She had spoken in all innocence and had been snubbed; not

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the first snub she had received from Margaret by any means. It flashed across her now, however, that not only outside, but inside the Croft, might she be made the means of exciting her companion's jealousy. It was the first time such an idea had occured to her; and it was a very repellent one; for being reared almost entirely among men, and treated with the attention and deference a solitary young woman is sure to meet with under such circumstances, it came naturally to Ellice to be glad of their friendship and society, and to accept liking and appreciation from them as a matter of course and right. Robin was far from being "a mere acquaintance" now, to *her*. He lived in the same house with her, walked with her and taught her to garden, read his own poetry to her and other poetry with her, and teased and talked to her almost as if she were his sister. And she liked him very much, and was glad to think that he liked her; seeing no reason why they should either do or affect to do otherwise. Margaret's sneer was like a dash of cold water in her face; though she was so far from comprehending its full meaning, that in trying to explain it away she only hit it on the idea that Robin had perhaps been rather neglecting the old sister for the new. Perhaps she had forgotten Gordon's warning and had been putting herself forward; and Margaret was vexed. It was very natural. She might feel so herself if she fancied any one was taking part of her place, with——But no! *that* could never be. There could be only one woman with Gordon now—herself; and with that conviction the happy, trustful look came back to her face in all its wonted sweetness.

They were coming down the hillside again rather more than an hour later, and by a different path to that which they had chosen in ascending; a mere track worn between tufted walls of brown and purple heather. The sun was sinking, and its level rays shone full in Margaret's face, and wrapt her in a sort of golden haze as she strode on, her head in the air, and a tall

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branch of bracken, golden-brown, too, in her hand. Suddenly a man, the same who had been watching them earlier in the afternoon, came into view at a turning of the path they were descending. He moved out of the way as they passed, but stood on the side gazing at Margaret with such rapt fixedness, that as if her own eyes seemed drawn to his by the intensity of his gaze, she turned her haughty head, and returned it by one as long and hard. Another moment and she had gone on her way again, when he overtook them, and lifting his hat said civilly, yet with an indefinable sort of easiness which Ellice did not like.

"Pardon me, young ladies, but I think you dropped this. I saw you going up the downs this afternoon and found it in the path."

His eyes were still fixed on Margaret's dark face as he held out a short silver pencil-case; not a lady's one, but the kind men carry at their watch-chain. The chain he had on was silver, and Margaret's eyes fell on it as, after the merest glance at the toy, she answered shortly.

"No it is not mine."

"Ah! some one else's loss. Excuse my stopping you," and, with a slight bow, he moved on.

Margaret had not acknowledged his salutation; but after joining Ellice, who was a few steps in advance, she turned coolly round to look after him. He was looking back also, and smiled as he lifted his hat again before going on his way.

"Margaret!" said Ellice gently, but with some uneasiness.

She had turned her head when Margaret stopped, and witnessed the little incident.

"I wanted to see where he was going," said Margaret, flushing. "I saw him before, when we were on the top of the hill, and I believe he just skirted round the hill on purpose to meet us. He had handsome eyes, I never saw a man stare so."

"Did he? I did not notice him," said Ellice.

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"Ah! I forgot. You expect men to stare at you. Robin told me that was the sort of thing you went in for in South America."

For the third time that day Ellice's brow was dyed scarlet. Perfectly well she remembered her naive remark, and Robin's observations on it. It hurt her like a blow from a friend's hand to have it jerked back in her face this way. Yet she answered with very fair dignity.

"We do not *expect* it. We ignore it. Men do it there, meaning no impertinence; and English women take no notice of what they cannot help, and what is common to everybody."

"Men don't think it worth their while to stare at '*everybody*' here," said Margaret. "That man meant it. He had glorious eyes."

"Then I would not have turned back to look at him, if I had been you," said Ellice, without noticing the last part of the sentence. Margaret's tone made her uncomfortable without *her* exactly knowing why. The latter burst out laughing.

"Why, Ellice, are you jealous? I thought a person like you, with the homage of *all* Merehatch and Hernecroft at your feet, would have been satisfied. Can't you spare one pair of eyes to another girl, handsome as they are?"

"Margaret, pray don't talk so. You're only joking, I know; but it isn't like you. I don't like it," cried Ellice, her tone almost petulant as she moved on more swiftly to escape from the subject.

Of all things else in Margaret, her laugh was the hardest and most repellent, whether as now boisterously ungoverned; or, as more often, bitter and ironical. A woman's laugh is not unfrequently an index to her character. Ellice was seeing a new phase of it to-day, and she found it a very distasteful one. The glimpse, too, which she had caught of the man in question had not been to her satisfaction. Somehow he seemed to have taken the glow out of the golden

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peace of that summer sunset; and the two girls crossed the moor and came down grassy slopes of the lower ridge of the downs in almost total silence.

Robin was on the watch for them at the long-meadow gate, and Margaret's observations respecting his weariness of the home party were put to flight by the frank look of pleasure which brightened his whole face as they came into sight.

"At last! Where *have* you been?" he exclaimed, flinging the gate open and coming to meet them. "Dona Elisa, you look pale. Has this big, long-legged sister of mine been tramping you off your feet. You really should remember, Madge, that every one hasn't your length of foot and stay."

"And you Robin, really should stay at home and take care of Ellice for yourself," said Margaret, with such unwonted irritation that she drowned Ellice's softer-voiced:

"We have had a lovely walk, Robin. I am not tired at all."

Robin answered his sister laughingly:

"I have been better employed in her service. Now, Dona Elisa, guess why I went to town to-day."

"To escape from our monotony," said Ellice wickedly, but laughing, too.

"You don't deserve to hear after such a suggestion. Look!" and he took a blue volume out of his coat-pocket and handed it to her.

"'Selections from———, Oh, Robin, how kind, how nice of you! Mrs. Browning, of all others, that I have longed to read? *Gracias muchissimos.*"

And her frank, joyous gratitude, intensified by a little remorse for late hard thoughts of him, was so pretty in its outspoken gladness that Robin felt as though he would gladly have gone double the journey for such another combination of look, and smile, and tone. There was something more than friendliness in his voice and eyes as he said:

"How pleasant it is to please you! I wish——" and

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then he became aware of the *sound* of his words, and turned them off by an affectation of grumbling.

"But what else could I do when I found a person's education so frightfully neglected! I didn't *want* to go to Boxminster.' to-day, I assure you; but really *not* to know the 'Sonnets from the Portuguese,' to love the husband and not the wife, to rave about the 'Last Ride,' and be ignorant of the 'Ride of the Duchess May;' to learn by heart his 'Lines to my Wife,' and not ever have heard of her 'Unlike are we, unlike, O princely heart'—it was too much! It was unnatural and sacrilegious and a tearing asunder of those whom fate and fitness had joined so indis——"

"When you have *quite* done scolding me for my ignorance," Ellice broke in with a laugh "(for I suppose all those grand words mean scolding—no?), please let me run off and repair the sacrilege as quickly as I can. I am longing to begin."

"Repair it certainly; but without running off. I am tired to death, and so are you. No, don't deny it. People who want to tell fibs shouldn't carry such tell-tale faces about with them. Come into the garden at once. The sun is off the bank under the rose hedge, and I will allow you to sit down there to rest while I read to you."

And Ellice went. She had got used to Robin's imperiously teasing manner by this time. I am not sure, indeed, that she did not like it. As for Margaret, she had marched off into the house five minutes ago. The book had put her out of both their minds.

The grass under the rose-bushes was green and soft and strewn with faintly tinted petals. The evening air, sweet and balmy after the intense heat of the day, came laden with fragrance from the knots and clumps and clusters of great, dewy-hearted roses, ruby red, palest pink, white and cream colored, which, set in dark green leafage and crowned by the last red rays of the setting sun, made a royal back ground for the fair little head cast so wearily back against the bank, the

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frail, childlike limbs so delicately outlined through their sombre drapery. Robin, thrown upon the turf at a little distance, had turned impetuously to the sonnets as the masterpieces of the dead, yet ever living poetess. He glanced at the small expectant face beside him. then at the verses, bit his lip, turned hurriedly to another page, and said, "I'll only read you one or two of the slightest first, and keep the Sonnets for another day. No one begins with the best of things, you know. *Woman* was made last in the creation."

His dark eyes rested rather tenderly on the small woman before him as he spoke but hers met them with all frank unconsciousness; and she answered him with a laughing quotation:

> ' 'Her prentice han' she tried on man,
> An' *then* she made the lasses O!'

But you're quite right, Don Roberto, I remember when I was a child I always felt sad after eating the cream off my bowl of milk with a spoon before breakfast. The rest tasted—poor. Go on!"

"I was speaking in earnest," said Robin a little testily; but the mingled mirth and homeliness had done him good for a moment, and he read through rather prosaically the "Lost Pan" and "Sleep;" then, softened by the beauty of the latter, more slowly and with greater impression that most perfect "Cry of the Children," glancing up at Ellice between every few verses or so until, incited by her lifted face, a little flushed by eagerness, and moistened, glistening eyes, he burst out: "Ellice, why hadn't we you always here? There is double delight in sharing any pleasure with you. You enjoy it. *You*——"

"Oh, don't stop to talk about me," said Ellice quickly. "Of course I enjoy pleasures, who does not? Go on reading. We can talk afterwards."

"You are vexed with me!" said Robin coloring. "You don't care for my—my friendship or appreciation; but if you knew what it is for a man to have no companion in his own home——"

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"You have Margaret, Robin. What are you thinking of?"

"My sister Margaret!" with great scorn.

"Gordon Maxwell has no sister," said Ellice gravely, "but, when we were little, I was the same as one to him. He was far more clever than I even then; but he would never have sneered at me to another girl for that. I do like you to be kind to me, Robin; but I shall not care for your kindness if it is to be at Margaret's expense."

"And I care for your generosity even though it is at mine," said Robin. "How is it that even when you are angry with me you always remind me of—No! I won't praise you, as you don't like it. Listen to me instead," and turning to another part of the book he went headlong into the lovely little ballad called "My Kate," dwelling with a special emphasis on:

> "'She never implied
> Your wrong by her right, and yet men at her side
> Grew nobler, girls purer, as thro' the whole town
> The children were gladder that *pulled* at her gown.'"

And still more earnestly:

> "The weak and the gentle, the ribald and rude
> She took as she found them and did them all good.
> It always was so with her: see what you have!
> She has made the grass greener even *here* with her'—"

He broke off abruptly before the last word; and Ellice filled up the hiatus with a long, happy sigh of appreciation. She had forgotten about herself again. "It does one good only to *read* such things!" she said at last very softly.

"It does one good only to *see* such women," Robin answered in the same tone. He crept a little closer to her and held out his hand.

"Ellice—" he began huskily; but in the same moment Ellice had sprung up, her face beaming with pleasure at something out of his sight. She nearly stumbled over his hand without seeing it.

"Aunt Maggie! What *lovely* peaches? *Ay que gusto para mi!* I have been longing for a peach ever since I came."

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CHAPTER VII.

"IT is no hotter there than elsewhere," said Margaret.

"Oh! don't you think so?—but I will go of course if you like."

The two girls were standing at the open window of the dining-room discussing which road they should take for their walk; and Ellice had made a little demur at the suggestion of St. Anne's Hill again. She had been nearly fried during the last excursion, and to-day was still hotter than the previous one; but at her first word of yielding Margaret cut her short roughly.

"I *don't* like. It doesn't matter to me whether you go or not. I would just as soon walk by myself."

"I am not so strong-minded," said Ellice laughing. "I would rather go with you, Margaret, wherever it is."

"Do as you choose, then. I can't say it makes any difference to me one way or the other."

Ellice looked a little distressed. Margaret was evidently in one of her ungracious moods when demur or yielding *were* alike ill received. It was a relief when Mrs. Herne came into the room, her comely figure swathed in a huge linen apron, and her round, rosy face evidently looking out for some one.

"You're not talking of going out, girls, are you?" she asked. "Dear, dear, now! that's a pity; for Mary's cut her hand so badly she can't hold a broom, and cook is doing her work for her; and there's half a peck of peas in the kitchen waiting to be shelled, so I thought——"

"That we would do them?" said Ellice readily. "Of course we will, eh, Margaret?"

"If mother wants me, of course," said Margaret. "For myself, I don't see the use of *two* people losing the whole morning shelling peas when one could do it as easily. But it's no use trying to get to the top of

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St. Anne's Hill unless one starts at once; so I had better give it up."

"Nay, then, leave down the peas, dearie," said Mrs. Herne kindly. "They can keep till to-morrow; tho' father won't think they'll eat as fresh. I'd do them myself, only I've a heap of house matters to see to, and——"

"Mightn't I do them?" Ellice asked somewhat timidly, but more anxious, withal, to serve her kindly aunt than please the unpleasable Madge; "that is——" her natural courtesy making her recollect herself—"if you really don't want me, Margaret."

"I *never* want any one," said Margaret shortly; "and if you are going to do the peas I may just as well go for my walk. Mind, I'm perfectly ready to do them if you'd rather not."

"It will be great fun. I have often had to do all the cooking at home," said Ellice, and then as Margaret left the room and Mrs. Herne began to urge her not to lose her walk: "Indeed I would just as soon stay at home. Besides, that hill is rather far for me. Now, don't say any more; but look at the clock, and see how quickly I will be over your peas;" and she danced off to the kitchen, her little feet pattering down the wide, stone flagged entry, and her blithe voice carolling out the lines which had been running in her head since yesterday:

"As thro the whole town
The children were gladder that clung to her gown,
My Kate! My Kate?"

Hard at work in his room upstairs among a host of books and papers, Robin caught the bird-like notes as they floated up to his window from the sunny courtyard below, the tune changing and wavering, now breaking into a snatch of one of the church hymns, now sinking upon a Spanish lullaby; anon dying away altogether as the little maiden moved about among the interior premises, but only to break out again the next moment so clear, and sweet, and joyous, that flinging

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down his pen the listener went to the window and looked out.

Ellice was just below him sitting in the flagged courtyard upon an inverted clothes-basket, a big white apron tied round her slim figure, a dish of peas in her lap, and a large, red earthenware pan partly filled with cool, green husks beside her. Half-a-dozen fowls, big white cochin-chinas, and consequential little dark brown bantams, were pecking and *cluttering* about her feet. The sunlight fell upon one side of her head and upon the old wall, crumbling and lichen-crusted, behind her; and turned her yellow plaits to gold, and the tuft of wall-flower, growing between the interstices of the stone to fiery rubies. It was like an old Dutch picture, quaint, and glowing, and homely; but ethereal-ised by the fair, pure face of the child woman in the centre. Robin leant out gazing at it for some moments before he went back to his papers.

He was writing what was to be a most indignant and eloquent defence of something which Ruskin had either done or said at a recent University fete-day; and which having been sneered at in some of the morning papers of the day, it was imperatively necessary should be at once reasserted as the only thing worth doing, or saying, and the said papers summarily put down as unworthy of notice by a scathing article in the *Students' Gazette*. He had been getting on brisky with it before, but now things began to go amiss.

"Deuce take it! There's a blot, and smudged too?" he muttered irritably. "Must write the page over again;" and then he crumpled up the sheet of paper, took a clean one and began afresh: "If any one doubts, or pretends to doubt Mr. Ruskin's ability both to pronounce and——" The song below ceased. "Pronounce and," wrote Robin over again.

"Mrs. Bantam, please not to be impertinent," said a gay voice in the yard. "Peck at your neighbor if you like; but don't peck my shoes."

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Robin looked down at his paper. "Hang it! there's a repetition! What ought it to be? Oh! 'define,'" and he went on: "to pronounce and define what are the correct principles of art as applied to labor in the person of *my Ka*—— Good Heavens!" scratching out vigorously; "what am I thinking of? It must be this beastly hot weather that unfits a man for mental work. I had better help that child shell peas, than go on making such idiotic mistakes. Parkins is in no hurry for this either. And what is she doing cook's work for?—all by herself too. I declare it isn't common courtesy to leave her," and he pushed his chair away and went downstairs.

In the entry he met Ellice coming in out of the sunlight, and folding her white apron as she walked. Her face brightened as she saw him, and uttered his name.

"Oh! Robin, I didn't know you were in. How fortunate!"

"Is it anything I can do for you? I am quite at your service," he said a little more eagerly than was his wont. Ruskin could wait another day.

"Even for a walk? Aunt Maggie wanted to send a note to Merehatch, and as Jack was out I had offered ——"

"Only too delighted. I want a stretch. You won't be long, will you? It's a lovely day."

"In getting the note? Oh no; and if you will post one for me too, I shall be so much obliged. It will save my going out; and it is written. Thanks very much," and she ran lightly upstairs. Robin stood still in huge disappointment. He had thought she meant to go *too!* Had he given up Ruskin to go Jack's errands for his mother? It did not improve matters when the servant girl came down to him with two letters, and he saw that Ellice's one was addressed to "Gordon Maxwell, Esq."

"I believe she writes to that Jesuit cousin every day." said Robin savagely. "A fine thing that *I* should have

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to carry the letter indeed! Why shouldn't I, though—as well as any other? I'm not going to make a fool of myself, am I?" A question difficult to answer!

* * * * * *

Almost on the extreme summit of St. Anne's Downs, but standing in a little hollow set round with ruddy-fronded bracken, are the remains of a ruined tower sufficiently picturesque to be visited by passing artists; and to figure occasionally on canvas or paper in the overcrowded rooms of Burlington House.

On the day I am describing one of the above named fraternity was seated on a camp-stool in front of it, a tall, blue cotton umbrella, ingeniously fastened into the earth by means of a spike, shading him from the sun; and an unfinished canvas on a small, portable easel before him.

"It looks nothing without a figure—curse it!" said the man, lifting his camp-stool back and looking at it grimly. "One can't even judge how it will tell. If I only had *that* girl now!"

He was a handsome man after his fashion (we have seen him before when he encountered the two maidens in their ramble on the previous day) tall and largely, though not powerfully made, running more to flesh than muscle even in his hands, which were sun-tanned but tapering almost to effeminacy, and with thick soft palms of which you could not help feeling conscious when you shook hands with him. His face was tanned too, with a reddish flush covering the cheeks and chin and the lower part of the nose, which latter was aquiline and somewhat too thick about the nostrils; the eyes large, dark, very prominent, and long lashed; forehead rather receding, with peculiarly thick hair of a reddish chestnut color curling closely down over it and round the back of the ears and throat, after the manner of the mediæval Italian pictures; moustache thick too, and almost hiding two rows of very white even teeth, set between bold sensual lips; no hair upon

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the cheeks or the full, dimple-clefted chin; and picturesque in his attire, a scarlet silk handkerchief knotted loosely round the brown massive throat, velvet jacket, olive-green and somewhat shabby grey knickerbockers and gaiters, and a high, soft-crowned felt-hat: a costume altogether rather theatrical-looking, and worn with an air of being conscious that it suited his face and figure.

The former suddenly brightened up even as we have been describing it; and the lips moved (after the manner of this man) with an oath.

"By all the devils in hell, or the seven thousand virgins of Cologne, there she is!"

As suddenly as if springing out of the ground in answer to his wish, a head had become visible over the line of purple heather on the brow of the hill. The shoulders rose into view next, and so higher and higher until a perfect woman stood clearly defined against the sunlit dazzle of the sky on the farther edge of the hollow; and then came stepping down with a certain slow, leisurely grace as though coming towards him. At the tower, however, she paused abruptly, passed round at the other side; and disappeared.

The painter sat still and waited.

Five minutes passed and there was no sign of her. He was not of a patient disposition, and his patience was exhausted. Still holding the pallet and brush in his left hand, he went to look for her.

She was sitting on a pile of grey, moss-grown masonry which had fallen close to the edge of the hill, that here broke away into a precipitous cliff. Her hat was off, and the heavy masses of her black hair, partly fallen out of the net which confined them, had drooped forward over her face. A book lay on her knees, but she was not reading it; only gazing fixedly out and away over the wide panorama of sea and sky spread beneath her.

Muttering something under his breath the artist came nearer, and at the sound of his step her eyes

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retreated to the open page. She might haved seemed to be absorbed in it, but that his quick-seeing glance detected a slight flush creeping up her cheek and ear.

"Pardon me," he said, taking off his hat with the same tone and manner as on the previous day, perhaps a trifle less confident and more insinuating. "Might I, as a poor stranger and a poorer artist, ask a great favor from you?"

Margaret lifted her head and looked at him, not amiably nor speaking; but with less forbiddingness perhaps than if the speaker had been of her own sex.

"I am painting this old ruin, not very successfully," and he slightly waved his hand to it as he spoke. "Would the lady I am addressing think me unpardonably presuming if I ventured to move my easel so as to include her figure in the sketch, and so give it the only thing which can prevent it being a failure?"

He was looking full into her eyes with a sort of *compelling* stare. Margaret had no resource but to answer, though the reply, spoken in her own low semi-sullen tone, was the reverse of gracious.

"This hollow is not mine. People may paint what they like in it."

He bent his head suavely.

"I am aware; but if an entire sketch depends on the central figure, and that were to resent being gazed at. and move, or go, away——"

He broke off, finished his sentence with another look of entreating admiration. As before, Margaret answered him.

"I came here to be quiet and read—I often do." The last three words were spoken as an after-thought with a sudden accession of color and hauteur which checked the glimmering of a smile just visible under the artist's heavy moustache. Without another word but, "Thanks exceedingly," he lifted. his hat, and returning to his easel began to paint. Margaret sat still as a rock, her hand clasped round her knees, her gaze

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riveted on the space before her as she had been when he came in sight.

The painter went on with his work. Every now and then he looked up at the model before him more sharply than usual, as though fearful she might have moved; but the long, *svelte* curves of the stooping purple-clad figure lay ever in the same position, crowned by the black head thrown slightly backwards and outlined against the pale blue sky.

"Better than a professional, by Jove!" he muttered to himself with a long breath of satisfaction, and went on with his sketch. At the end of half an hour Margaret had not moved by so much as half a hair's breadth; but his practised eye detected a fixed expression tightening the corners of her mouth and jaw .He rose at once and came towards her.

"How can I thank you enough for your goodness! But only a woman with a soul for art would have the will or the power to assist it so completely; and to *her* thanks would be an insult. May I show you the sketch you have so generously sat for?"

There was a difference in his tone. Though he still preserved the high-flown form of speech, the better part in the man, his own inward love and pride in his profession, warmed it to honest gratitude. The change was powerful enough to thaw through even Margaret's chilly torpor. The heavy lashes drooped over her eyes as if to hide a sudden new-born light in them, and there was a crimson flush in her cheek as she turned to look at the canvas. It was a long look, gradually changing from wonder to admiration, and thence to pathos. The artist, watching her narrowly, said nothing till she moved away, and then observed:

"You should not have seen it so soon. It is only a sketch as yet; and there is something out of drawing there," indicating the left arm.

"Would it take long to finish;" she asked looking up at him.

"Alas! how can I tell if it will ever be finished!

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.Painting from memory is at best such a poor make-shift; and I may not have another chance of—unless indeed——" his bold, handsome eyes were full upon her, looking into her own. He paused a moment as if to let their expression sink, and added softly—"*you* were by chance to pass this way again in the course of your rambles."

The crimson glow was still high in Margaret's dark face. She answered hesitatingly:

"I very seldom go the same way two days running."

"No——" he said, and stopped there, bending over his picture and gazing at it with a sort of half-regret. "Perhaps it was folly to commence it," he went on, low as if to himself. "Yet *what* a sensation it would make in the world if I only could——"

Margaret looked at the picture too.

"It would be a pity not to finish it," she said with an irresolution so foreign to her that it disturbed herself. "If I should come this way again, perhaps——"

"I shall have another try at it the day after to-morrow at this time in the afternoon," he put in quickly; "so if you happen to be here——"

But he had been too rapid for Margaret; or something in herself frightened her. She drew herself up haughtily, and turning away answered with marked coldness:

"It is not at all likely. I never know beforehand where I may choose to walk."

"No!" he said in the same tone as before; "And this hot sunlight effect will not last. A change of weather——Ah! well, Fate and you have been very good to me to-day. I thank both from my heart; and for the rest if I fail in trying to finish it from memory 'twill be *in* a grander effort than many a success of other men. Is this yours?" handing Margaret a glove he picked up; "I hope your charity to-day has not over-taxed your patience or detained you from—your companion."

"I have no companion this afternoon. I came out

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alone," Margaret said, taking the glove. Her hand touched his as she did so, and again the color mounted to her dark cheek. With no smile and hardly an apology for a bow, she turned away and went out of the hollow with the same slow leisurely step she had entered it.

"So!" said the artist to himself. "I thought so. The other girl—the washed-out one—wouldn't have come. Odd what a deal there is in color and physiognomy! Washed-out, flaxen-haired women are generally cold-blooded, prudish and poor-spirited. As for this cross between an Iceland bear and a Downshire Semiramis——" he broke off, the laugh which had been playing about his full, curled lips so long, breaking out low but hearty—"she will come the day after to-morrow, and at the same time. No fear for that! A queer girl, though, very queer, by Jove! Did she smile once? Don't think so; and who the deuce *is* she? Never mind, I'll find out next time I see her. Ye gods, what a glorious contour it is!" and he bent over his canvas looking at it lovingly. "A man might find his fortune in her—and his death *by* her! She looks as if she could put a knife into you if you provoked her, and then walk away and wash her hands. Now, I suppose——" and stepping upon the pile of stones where Margaret had been sitting, he gazed after her figure slowly vanishing in the distance—"that nine men out of ten would follow her and find out all about her. She walks slowly enough, as if she wouldn't mind it. But not so fast. *Il y a des femmes et des femmes*, and some want different handling from others. You are as proud as the devil, my beautiful savage, but you came to me to-day, not I to you, and you'll do it again before I ve done with you."

And so finishing he lit a short pipe, took a newspaper out of his pocket, and throwing himself on his back among the heather, proceeded to indulge in a short *dolce far niente* before packing up his traps and returning to his lodging in a neighboring hamlet.

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Margaret had nearly gained the confines of her father's property before she met a person of any sort; and then it was the Squire himself who crossed her path, coming home from the farthest field where the wheat was being cut. His broad, red face brightened generally at the sight of the girl.

"Eh! Madge, coming out to meet thy old dad? That's a good lass. Zounds! but I'm in luck's way at present wi' two such daughters to run after me. There was the maid Ellice out i' the heat o' the sun at three o'clock as far as Seven Oaks Meadow, wi' nought but a white pinafore thing over her head, just to bring me a jug o' lemonade. Her own making too, forsooth! 'Tis a good little wench, Madge, and a pleasant, an' worthy o' a better name than her own ill-sounding foreign one. 'Dev-rooks,' indeed! Who ever heard of a Christian maid surnamed Devrooks?"

"She will change it when she is married," said Margaret. There was a softer look than usual in her brown face, almost a smile on her lip. Instinctively the Squire felt that his daughter was in good humor, and glowed in answer to it, like a round copper pan reflecting the beams of a wintry sun.

"Aye, aye, my girl," he said, tucking Margaret's hand through his arm and turning homewards; "an' we mun be finding her a mate one o' these days—a decent, God-fearing Saxon lad of our own degree. There be such an' enow in the shire; an' the wench will make him a good wife. 'Tis the handiest, brightest little puss cat that ever breathed; an a good Christian-minded maiden into the bargain. Hark to her now!"

For they were nearing the house, and Ellice's voice, sweet and true as a linnet's, could be heard trilling out among the rose and seringa bushes in the garden one of the hymns "Ancient and Modern:"

"We plough the fields and scatter
The good seed on the land."

"Oh! Ellice is dreadfully good," answered Margaret. "She ought to marry that Curate who is so

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often at the Hall; only she would be too Low Church for him."

But she said it quite good-temperedly, and when they came round the corner of the hedge, and found a little group on the lawn consisting of Mrs. Herne placidly knitting in her big wicker-chair, Ellice similarly employed on the grass at her feet, and Robin swinging to and fro in a rocking-chair with his mother's shawl for a cushion and a handkerchief over his face to keep off the flies, Margaret's face wore quite a pleasant expression.

"Get up, *roi Faineant*, and let the Squire sit down," cried Ellice, springing to her feet with the old-fashioned reverence for age, which, exported years ago by some of our emigrant families, still flourishes in remote corners of the globe uninfluenced by the hail-fellow-well-met independence of the present day. "Why, Margaret, we thought you were never coming back at all."

"She's been to find the old man, an' bring him home," answered the Squire, ignorant of the length of absence to which Ellice alluded, and sitting heavily down on the chair which Robin, with a rather ludicrous feeling of doing something very filial and chivalrous, had vacated for him. "Eh, but it's mortal hot in the fields to-day. We've done the long meadow, wife," and he sighed wearily.

"Thou art just tired out, father," said Mrs. Herne, laying a soothing hand on the Squire's wrinkled and sinewy wrist. "Ellice lovey, will'ee run and ask the girl to bring the master a glass of ale out by here? 'twill do him good, poor dear! an' Maggie's tired too."

"No, I'm not," said Margaret flurriedly, and anxious, *without hardly* knowing why, to escape; but Ellice, ever light of foot, had forestalled her, and was back almost before she had finished speaking. Robin, who had thrown himself full length on the grass, laughed at her agility.

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"Why, Ellice, you ought to have been christened Mercuria. Have you wings on your feet?"

"No," said Ellice quietly. "Nature (like ancient Greece,) didn't see the necessity for them."

"How do you mean?" and Robin opened a pair of sleepy eyes.

"Only that in those old days it was the young men who flew to do the ladies' errands. As you say Mercury ought to be a female god—in England!"

"Somebody is satirical," said Robin, reddening. It was not the first feather-lash he had had on the score of home-courtesies from Ellice, who, brought up in the land where there are five men to one woman, had been used to command the services of the former *ad libitum.* He got up soon and strolled away, feeling rather indignant. Had he not gone down to the village to post letters that very afternoon, and given up his chair to the Squire? It was too bad; and Margaret had disappeared too, and was seen no more by any of the family till Ellice met her coming out of her room when the supper-bell rang.

"Did you have a pleasant walk? It must have been terribly hot," said the younger girl smilingly.

"Tolerably. It was cool on the top of the downs."

"I suppose you did not meet any one?"

"Hardly any one. Who *are* there to meet hereabouts?" But Margaret's cheek flushed as she spoke. Whatever her other faults, equivocation had not as yet been one of them. She sat the rest of the evening in a sort of dream, neither speaking nor seeming to listen to any of the rest of the party; and yet even Robin noticed that she looked handsomer than usual and wore a softer expression.

In her heart she was far away in company with the painted portrait of herself, and the bold black eyes which had looked with such audacious admiration into her own.

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CHAPTER VIII.

"SHE will come, and at the same hour!"

So Nino Gerrant, figure-painter in oil and water-colors, had said to himself when Margaret's tall figure disappeared over the hill-side. So he repeated on the following day when he stayed in bed smoking and reading a dilapidated French novel, in place of starting out with easel and canvas as was his wont.

"No need to go to-day. I can't do any more at it without her, and she won't be there till to-morrow," he muttered, flinging himself back on the bed after dragging the checked moreen curtain across the little window to soften the daylight glare. "By Jove! I've been in luck to get hold of such a girl; and when I only expected to pick up a few backgrounds, too! The very thing to take in next year's Academy, and sell like wild-fire. Shouldn't wonder if Agnew gave me two hundred for it. Worth nine, if I were Long or Tadema —curse them! But I'm not, and anyhow two is something. How mad Mullingar will be, and Farren too! Both of them going to the dogs for want of a new model. Wonder Farren sells a picture at all, the public must be getting so deadly sick of that red-haired woman of his, with a figure like a wet-nurse in a bathing-gown: fatuous fool that he is, not to know when he's done a subject to death" and with a contemptuous puff at his cigar, Gerrant relapsed into sleepiness, and lay dozing and smoking until, roused by a business-like idea, he suddenly burst out again: "She might just as well have come to-day confound her! Suppose this weather changes! And it was all my fault for not pressing it—idiot that I am! She only wanted a word, and it may be pouring to-morrow. I wonder who the deuce she is! She speaks like a lady, and her hands are too soft and well-shaped to have done any hard work; and yet her clothes, and hair, and boots. . . . .

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The washed-out one was a lady, though—indisputably. Clergyman's daughter, I should say, and this one the schoolmaster or sexton's girl, made a *protege* of, and inclined to resent the patronage which has lifted her out of her sphere. By George, I wish she *were* a field-hand! I'd make a regular model of her, and have her here to paint every day. I should like a dozen studies of her at least: one in an angry mood particularly. 'Twouldn't be difficult to provoke it," and he broke into a low, hearty laugh. "By the way, I wonder if the people here could tell me who she is. These rustics seem to know every one in the neighborhood for ten miles around. I'll ask," and stretching out a long, lazy arm he laid hold of the bellrope and pulled it.

A maiden answered the summons; no rural Venus, but one of a sort who seem especially born for the service of small lodging-house keepers; something over four feet high by three broad, arms like windmills, legs like bedposts, face like a peony and perpetually embellished by an equal proportion of grin and chicken-pox.

"Did 'ee ring fur I, sir?" she asked modestly, the grin predominating in the present instance.

"Yes," said Gerrant. "Come in and shut the door. I want to talk to you.

Kitty glanced backwards at a pail left on the landing without, as though wondering how long the talk would delay her from her other labors, and grinned again expectantly.

"Shut the door," said Gerrant impatiently. "I don't want the whole house to hear every word I say."

"Please, sir, missis telled I as a woren't to shut the door not when I was attendin' on you, her said, please, sir."

"Not *shut-the-door!* And why not, in the name of the five fools of Florence?"

"Please, sir, her says acause as how you artist gents be so powerful wild, more betoken wi' the servant lasses," said Kitty readily, and with a bland composure

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which was not even shaken by Gerrant opening his mouth and swearing at her and her mistress in good round English for fifty consecutive seconds.

"Stand out of the way," he said roughly at last; and, as the girl moved to one side with startled promptitude, he caught up his heavy boot and flung it at the door, shutting it most effectually.

"There!" falling back on his pillows again, and laughing heartily at the girl's astonishment. "And I wish it had been Mrs. Jubbins' head instead. As if there were a woman in the house, or the village either, that a man with half an eye would care to look at twice! If there were, indeed, it's not Mrs. Jubbins and her doors that would—ha! ha! ha! There! I don't want to waste time in fooling, and you needn't look like a Cheshire cat frightened into a fit. There's sixpence for you, and now, try to answer me a simple question if you can. Do you know the people living about here by sight!"

"Yes please, sir, a' be boorned 'ere an' a' knaw ivery 'ooman an' child in t' place's well's my own mother, an' right away down to Weston-Mitches."

"Aye, but that's not the way I want. Do you know Merehatch, a village about three miles on the other side of St. Anne's Hill?"

"Eh, yes, sir," said Kitty, grinning more than ever. "T' yoong man as keeps company wi' I, lives down tu Merehatch an' cooms over 'ere ivery other Sabbath a courtin'. T' other Sabbath missis let I out i'stead to see after 'im."

"Then you know the place pretty well?" said Gerrant, to intent on the end of his questions of joking.

"Near by's well's this'n, please, sir. A' wore in place there three year at schule-master's."

"Oh! that's to the point. And has *he* a daughter now?"

"Nay, sir, he's none wedded."

"A very correct answer! nor any niece or—or girl

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of any sort about the house? (I don't know what can have fixed the idea in my head," he muttered, "except her language, and the other girl being with her.) The parson has a daughter, hasn't he?" he added abruptly.

"Nay, sir. Folks du tell as him 'ave craved fur one sadly like; but Missis Calthorpe, her's been brought to bed of boys ivery time; an' the last born he's nine year old come Michaelmas."

Gerrant laughed.

"Kitty, you are amusing; more amusing than instructive to me at present. Do you know *any* family at Merehatch with two girls in it, one very dark and one—No, though, they could never belong to one another and the washed out one was in deep mourning. It seems hopeless. Do you know *any* girl, very dark and tall and gipsy-looking living there? not a lady—I think—eh?"

But this was descriptive and general, and Kitty's rustic mind did not soar high enough for generalities. She only scratched her head and mumbled.

"Eh? Noa, sir. A'dawn't mind un exac'ly," and Gerrant was fain to give it up and let her return to her work

He was at his post early on the following day, however, and after a good look at the ruin and the surrounding *locale* to make sure his model was not before him, set up his easel and began to work at the background of his picture, muttering to himself, "It's well that I got in the sky the other day. There's nothing but haze this afternoon. Looks as if we were going to have a thunderstorm. By George! I hope she'll come. What a sell it would be if she didn't after all!"

It seemed likely. The sun shone on through a faint yellow mist, gradually deepening and burning into orange. You could see a long quiver of heat rising above the fringe of scorched grass on the edge of the hill. The tiny pimpernels had shut their scarlet eyes long before. The bees kept up a ceaseless, drowsy

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humming over the golden blossoms of the tufted toad-flax and the crimson, streaky budded vetch. The far-away line of sea and the expanse of country between was wrapped in a sort of dun-colored haze, through which the great red sun looked with a lurid face. The hours wore on, and the painter painted on; but no one came. Once indeed a frolicsome young goat came gambolling down to his side, and frisked round and about him for a few seconds as though challenging him to a game of play before bounding off again. Once a great bold-barred wasp got under his blue umbrella and flew round and round his head, bumping its soft wings and hairy body against his face in vain efforts to escape until he knocked it down and crushed it; but that was all—at first!

Suddenly he became conscious that some one was looking at him. It might be the goat again; he did not stir. Then he heard footsteps treading in the dry heather; footsteps going *from* him. Still it might be a stranger; he would not stir. Presently they came back again and passed behind him, keeping along the ridge of the hollow. He knew them for a woman's now by the swish of her gown; yet he would not look round, but went on painting, glanced at the sky once or twice, shook his head regretfully; and at last laid down his brush as though he could do no more. In the same moment the steps came towards him with a swift determined tread; and Margaret stood at his side saying:

"I am come, you see. Since you are here too, paint me if you like. There is no reason why you shouldn't," and turned to her old seat.

Gerrant looked at her. Her cheeks were blazing with a dusky fire which even lit the great, inky eyes, gazing at him with a mingled defiance and shame hard to read, while her lips were set in two straight, tightened lines. He knew a good deal of woman, enough to make him see that a great commotion had been going on within her, enough to make him decide in a

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moment how to treat her so as to soothe and yet make it useful for his own purposes.

"I am glad," he said easily and as if it were a matter of course. "I began to fear after all that you cared less for art than I see you do. Yes, sit there and turn your face to the south, so!"

But he did not return to the picture. but taking up his sketch-book began very rapidly and skilfully to draw her face with this new "strung" expression on it. It was fading into her normal look before he finished, and he said coolly:

"I knew you would."

"Why?" The shamed defiance was back again in a moment, flashed out on him in eyes and cheeks and lips.

He only answered at first. "Keep your head still," and coolly added the finishing touches to his sketch; then, having achieved what he wanted, said in his softest tone.

"I did not think you were the kind of woman to give up a favorite walk and a pleasant resting-place for mere caprice and the thwarting a poor painter in a work which you knew would make the world ring if it were only successful. I could not look at the rough sketch of you on my canvas here and believe you capable of the pettiness of an inferior mind. *You* would never have sat for the beginning if you had not meant to sit for the end. Of course I knew you would come."

"Yes," she said so low that he could hardly hear more than the defiance which had crept from the lips to the tone; "I have. What then? It hurts no one."

"And will benefit many," he put in gently.

"No one really wants me at home," she went on with a sort of sullenness, as if pleading against some unseen accuser.

"Art wants you here; art and—I," said Gerrant. "You were right to come, and—you will come again."

She made no answer, and he pressed it.

"You will not let me go on working at this, only to

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be forced to leave it unfinished in the end? You will come again?"

"If I can—yes," she answered hurriedly.

"Till it is completed?"

"Yes."

He knew she would then. He had got what he wanted, and he went on painting in silence. By-and-by he came up to her and said:

"Do you mind my doing something to your head?"

She turned her face and looked up at him with a half-uneasy suspicion; but her eyes fell before his, and she did not speak.

"Your hair is different to what it was the last time, tighter and tidier. It ought to fall on the neck so as to cast a shadow. Will you let me treat you simply as a model and put it so?"

He had his hand on her head before she could answer, and she did not resist, though he saw that even her throat was dyed to crimson with the hot blood which rushed to the surface of her brown skin as she felt his smooth, supple fingers drawing the masses of her hair out of their confining net. Masses indeed! He had really meant only to loosen it sufficiently to suit the picture; but as his over-hasty hand untied the string that bound them they fell suddenly forwards and downwards, a cascade of sable, waveless locks falling below her knees, and over-flowing the efforts of his ten fingers to restrain their sun-bronzed weight of raven beauty.

He uttered a low exclamation, not compunction, but sheer joy and admiration at the wealth of woman's locks thus disclosed to him, and dropped upon his knees to gather it back; but Margaret sprang to her feet, tearing it roughly out of his hands, confronted him, the dark, half-savage beauty of her face glowing with the fire of an outraged goddess from between the folds of the sable curtains falling round her; her breath coming in quick short pants.

"How *dare* you!" she exclaimed passionately.

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Gerrant, still kneeling, looked up at her. This new revelation of his strange model had confused him; yet he had *mastery* enough over himself to recognize in that look, that unless he conquered her his opportunity was lost, and the picture too.

"I really beg your pardon," he said coolly; "both for not being as skilful as a trained lady's maid, and for never imagining that any living woman could own such a load of hair that a mere touch would bring it down."

"I am going," was all Margaret vouchsafed to say. her trembling hands angrily twisting the insulted locks back into a rope.

"And why?" he asked, more coolly still. His little compliment had failed; but he was not going to give way; more especially when, in her present position, she offered a more fascinating study to his artistic senses than ever before.

"You did it on purpose. You had no right. A stranger: . . . . it was insolent," she said, in short, broken sentences, growing embarrassed as he smiled.

"*On purpose!* You are entirely mistaken, I assure you. What good could it do me to pull your hair down, except to spoil it for my picture, and offend you?"

His perfect *sang-froid* disconcerted the ignorant and excited girl. Her face became as pale as it had been red, and the momentary gleam faded out of her great, heavy-lidded eyes. He saw his advantage and followed it up.

"Sit down again," he said, rising to his feet and speaking in the half-authoritative, half-indulgent tone one would use to a child. "We are losing time, and you are breaking your promise. There!" as Margaret obeyed with a kind of stunned passivity which showed him that this mode of dealing with her was successful. "Now, if you will put on your net again —No! the hair a little looser—so—excuse me," and he bent over her, touching it lightly so as to bring it into the required position. "Why, when I was paint-

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ing Lady Ethelind Gordon as Miranda, I had to fix her hair, and hands, and head every day, and sometimes twice a day; but your *vraie grande dame* knows the necessities of art, and would think it as great an affectation to quarrel with an artist for posing her as with a doctor for feeling her pulse."

Margaret turned around on him, her eyes glittering.

"I am not Lady Ethelind what-you-may-call-'em. I am only Margaret Herne," she said bitterly. "But neither am I affected. I should not be here if I were; Whatever else people have called me, they could never call me that."

"No, I don't think they could," said Gerrant, smiling. "You mistook me, that was all. Did I not say so? And perhaps you never sat for your portrait before?"

"Never. Who would want to paint me — here?" she answered with her wonted bitterness. Gerrant smiled again.

"Any one who knew how to paint at all. I am more fortunate than I thought. Now, shall we go on?" and returning to his seat he took up his brushes again, while Margaret settled into her former position, neither moving eye nor limb, until, about after three quarters of an hour's silent working, he asked her if she were not very tired.

"Not very," she said, without stirring.

"You ought to be; but you make such a wonderfully good model when you like, one forgets the time."

"What *is* the time? I can't stay long," she *asked* hurriedly.

"Oh, early yet; but I am not going to torture your kindness. Let me give you a little of this. One needs it after climbing a hill like this alone."

He took out a small sherry-flask, poured some of the contents into a tiny cup and brought it to Margaret. She hesitated.

"I don't want it," she said nervously.

"Pardon me, I am sure you do, and will sit all the

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better for it. I always have to keep refreshments for sitters in my studio in London."

"Do you live in London?" asked Margaret quickly.

She had yielded and swallowed the wine. It did her good, as he said.

"Yes, except when I am on a sketching tour, as now."

"You must be very happy. I envy you."

"Do you?" and he laughed a little at the sadness of her tone. "I suppose from that *you* live in the country."

"Of course I do."

"Always?"

"Always—since I was born."

"I guessed as much; and you don't like it?"

"I *hate* it," said Margaret with an energy almost startling. It only made him smile.

"I guessed that too; yet country life must be pleasant if one is rich, and can get away if one wants."

"*Men* can get anywhere if they want. I can't," Margaret answered sullenly.

"What, not even to your friends in town for awhile?"

"I have no friends—anywhere."

"No friends!" with some amazement. "Ah! I see, you are too handsome. Handsome women seldom have among their own sex; but you must have relations residing——"

"Here," put in Margaret shortly.

"At Merehatch? You were coming from there, I think, when I first saw you."

"Close by. Hernecroft is my home."

"Hernecroft——" he repeated, trying to remember if he knew the place among his rambles, and could settle her position thereby.

"The old farmhouse on this side of Merehatch," she answered quietly. "My father is getting in the corn, now."

A farmer's daughter! So *that* was what she was!

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Gerrant felt relieved. She was so strange, so unlike any girl he had ever met or seen before, that the more he saw of her the less he had been able to decide on her state of life. But—only a farmer's daughter! To the popular artist, asked to fill a corner in grand ladies' *salons*, and feted and sought out by middle-class "lion-hunters," the son of a second-rate photographer and a professional singer, this meant a being inferior to himself; a rustic lass with whom (albeit so different to every other country lass he had ever dreamt of) he need not stand on ceremony, or dread of getting into trouble. Dropping easily down into a sitting position among the ferns at her feet he turned up his handsome face to her, and said laughing:

"*You* live in a farm all your life! You look as if you came from a Moorish castle."

"I wish I did; or from anywhere but here," she said resentfully. "What is *your* name? Are you one of the artists my brother so often talks of—Leighton or Poy—Poynber, is it?"

"Nothing so exalted as an R. A. of any sort. You may have heard of me, though. I am Nino Gerrant." The name over his father's little photographic studio in Chelsea was Grant; but Nino's sense of the euphonious had early made him add a second *r* and an *e* to it. He said the name now as though it were one Margaret could not fail to know.

"I!—I hear nothing. Do you sell your pictures in London?"

"After exhibiting them at the Academy or those minor show-places for the efforts of genius—the Dudley or Suffolk Street."

"Will this picture go there?"

"To the Academy? Certainly, if it gets its deserts, and be hung on the line too."

"What's that?"

"The only place where anybody can see it; and therefore, as a rule, absorbed by the R. A.'s."

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"And who are they? I ought to know I suppose; but I don't."

"Men who are given a diploma for painting the worst pictures in the place."

"You are laughing at me," said Margaret angrily, "I am not a fool."

"No, but the public are; and the R. A.'s laugh at the public, and I at them. Are you rested, Miss Herne?"

"Yes."

"Let me put you in position, then. You are a model again now, you know."

He had risen and was just bending over her to arrange a fold of her dress when a crash as of a thousand cannons split the oppressive stillness overhead, and made them spring apart as though they had been struck by a shell fired from the very portals of heaven.

It was preceded by a flash of fire white and forked, blinding Margaret's eyes, and turning Gerrant's face to the color of paper.

"Gracious Heavens!" he exclaimed. "The storm is coming. We shall be caught in it."

CHAPTER IX.

INVOLUNTARILY they both looked up at the sky. The whole aspect of the day had changed during their short dialogue. The haze deepened into a thick, murky cloud, lurid and red towards the west, blacker and more lowering in the zenith. There was no wind as yet; but towards the east heavy black clouds were driving rapidly over the dingy woolly vapour which had blotted out the sun: and the tree-tops in Haslam wood about a mile distant were beginning to sway and bend as if beneath the weight of a mighty hand unseen. An unearthly sort of yellow light was diffused over the whole face of nature. Down in the valley the

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cattle cowered for shelter under the shadows of trees and hedgerows. A flock of sea-gulls flew by overhead, stooping low upon their broad grey wings as they passed, and screaming wildly as though fleeing in terror from the storm then raging over the distant, rack-hidden sea.

And then, while they stood transfixed and trembling, in one moment it came!

In a blaze of lightning so vivid it seemed to wrap, not only the hill-top, but the whole round earth in a sheet of dazzling, quivering flame, and a crash even louder and more deafening than the first, the gale swept down on them with a force which nearly carried them off their feet, and laid the low bushes and the heather flat as though a red-hot ploughshare had been driven over them.

"Your *picture!*" cried Margaret.

Like a paper bullet tossed on a strong man's breath, the artist's umbrella had whirled past them, broken and mangled, while its owner stood too unnerved and bewildered to put out a hand to save it; but in the same moment Margaret sprang forward, and before canvas and easel could follow its example had laid her strong young grasp upon them, and, only turned her head to call Gerrant to follow her example with the paints, bounded off to the shelter of the ruin, carrying the heavier things in her arms as though they had been but a handful of twigs.

The wind had repeated Nino's offence and torn the net from her head, and as she sped across the heather, her long black locks blowing out straight as a sable banner behind her, the lightning playing over her uncovered brow and gleaming eyes, her short, scanty garments blown by the wind so as to show every line and curve of limb and muscle, she looked to the artist like the very genius of the storm, a creature to brave and trample on the elements warring around her.

Mechanically he caught up his paints and followed, and treading on her footsteps found himself in the

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shelter of a deep, arched door-way on the lee of the ruin, the interior of which was entirely blocked up with stones and rubbish. His own hat had been carried away by the storm now tearing like a living and furious giant over the downs; and he was so out of breath he could hardly stammer out his thanks as he saw her depositing the canvas in the farthest back corner of the archway. Margaret smiled calmly. It was the first smile he had ever seen on her face; and it almost stunned him by the change it worked in the dark, scornful features.

"We are safe here," she said cheerfully. "This is the sheltered side, and well for us too! The rain will be down in another minute, and nothing could stand against this wind alone."

Nothing indeed! He had to bring his head close to hers in order to catch what she said, so terrible was the mingled war of wind and thunder echoing and reverberating among the crumbling pile of ruined masonry heaped about and around the two young people on that lonely hill-top. Every moment the darkness thickened and increased about them; and Gerrant was completely unnerved, his face pale as ashes, and his heavy under-lip positively quivering as he said:

"I never saw such a hurricane. Do you think it will last long?"

"No, oh no, they never do; but it will be very bad while it does last," Margaret answered, still smiling. He looked at her in admiration.

"You don't seem to mind it a bit. I suppose you are used to this sort of thing hereabouts."

"I have been caught in them before—yes; but we don't have them often. People say a Downshire storm is a grand thing."

"I suppose so! A Downshire girl is one most certainly: only I would rather have her without a thunder accompaniment."

"*You* are not afraid of thunder!" she said, flashing her great eyes surprised on him.

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"Afraid? No, but it always has peculiar effect on me. Feel my hand now."

He held it out to her; and instinctively she put out her own and touched it, but drew it back almost immediately, the slim, brown fingers and the whole arm quivering as if from an electric shock.

Gerrant clasped his own over them and held it there.

"You see," he said gently, but trying to look into her eyes, "it is as cold as ice. Yours is warm, though. Do you know what I would do, if I might, to thank it for saving my picture?"

And then, before she could free herself, he bent his head over the trembling hand and kissed it.

"Let me go," said Margaret roughly. Her face like her hand was burning, but whether from anger or agitation he could not tell. *He* thought it was the former. "Does Lady Ethelind Gordon let you kiss her hands when she is sitting to you for her portrait?"

"You are not sitting for your portrait now, though you would *never* make a handsomer one; and if the Lady Ethelind had served me as you did when that tornado burst on us, I am sure she would have thought the least I could do was to kiss her noble hand in requital."

"People—out in the world—seem to kiss just for custom or politeness," said Margaret slowly. "It is only here they *mean* something."

"Who mean something?"

"Kisses."

Gerrant opened his eyes. This girl was even stranger than he thought. He could not tell that her mind had wandered back to Ellice's kiss on both cheeks and Robin's observations on her rudeness in rejecting it. He answered as most men in his place would.

"Where *you* are in question they always must mean something."

"I do not like people to kiss me," said Margaret

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with a dreamy look in her eyes; "not strange women and girls at any rate——Ah!"

It was only another flash of lightning, nearer and more brilliant than its predecessors; but it effectually silenced Gerrant for the moment and checked something he was going to say or do. Margaret had shrunk back, instinctively covering her eyes; and he crouched down beside her. The doorway was very narrow, it just held them sitting close together with the precious canvas behind them and the lightning playing before their eyes; and it was so dark that they could hardly have seen each other's faces but for the forked flashes which, like the Archangel's sword, seemed to split the murky sky asunder before breaking in a white quiver of fire which lit the whole country for miles around.

"This is too terrible," said Gerrant huskily, sentiment forgotten in sheer nervous fear. His face was almost hidden behind Margaret's shoulder; but she turned her head to look at him, smiling again while her loosened hair blew round him like a veil.

"It will be worse in a moment. Hush! here it is—the rain!"

And even as she spoke down it came, roaring and hissing with the noise of a thousand waterfalls, rushing down the hillsides, tumbling in tiny cascades from rock to rock, and beating on the flattened heather in drops as big as peas. In the same moment the wind changed, and the rain driving slantwise penetrated Margaret's side of the archway and drenched her through in three minutes. But though Gerrant tried to make her change places with him she resisted, rather sitting more forward so as to shield him till he put out his arm and drew her closer back, telling her that she was mad to expose herself so. She only said:

"I don't mind Downshire rain. I am used to it," and then sat still with a flush on her cheek and a sparkle in her eye which gave her so different a look to the

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heavy-broad girl who was wont to lounge about Hernecroft and scowl at acquaintances that she could hardly have been recognised for the same.

So they remained for about ten minutes, not speaking or moving, deafened by the thunder, blinded by the lightning and bewildered by the rain which rattled and clattered around them, and poured in a stream like a waterfall from the roof of their temporary refuge. Then, as if by magic, the wind lulled, the rain ceased to fall, the thunder and lightning stopped, a fresh breeze sprang up out of another quarter of the compass, and seizing the heavy mantles of black cloud hanging overhead, tore it into a thousand shreds and drove its ragged fragments before the blast of its cold, strong breath. The sun burst out from behind like a monarch parting the gold-lined curtains of his tent, while every tree and twig flashed out a sword of diamonds glittering in instant salutation before his royal smile. The birds on every side gushed out into a very tempest of song, a *Te Deum* of thanksgiving over the rejuvenated world: and in five minutes the sky was again a lofty tent of blue, brilliant and dazzling as though newly washed in the baptism of the just passed storm, flooded with liquid gold in the west, and only banked on the southern horizon by a long, low range of cloud, inky black and crested with flame, from which a distant intermittent rumble still gave a dying token of the thunder-giant so lately vanquished.

Gerrant and Margaret came out into the sunshine with something of the dizzy, bewildered sensation of shipwrecked people suddenly drifted to dry land. The hollow in which they had been painting was a pool now, sparkling in the sunshine and set round by dripping gorse-bushes. Streams of water ran glittering and trickling down a thousand places in the steep brown sides of the hill where it overlooked the valley. Miniature lakes and ponds had formed in the green meadows below. The baked mud-ridges were hidden now beneath the swiftly-running streamlet, and the

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shadows of the trees lay black and sharp as if newly cut out on the moist gold-green grass where the cattle stood shaking drops from their dappled sides in the sunshine. The broad expanse of brown and purple heather on the brow of the hill looked like a field of Siberian crystals, a breastplate for a monarch cast upon the smiling earth; but Margaret's feet and skirts were drenched as though they had been dragging through a pond; and her hat, which she found lying by the stone where she had been sitting, was full of water. She laughed aloud as she turned it upside down, and then proceeded to twist up the redundancy of her dripping locks before going home.

"Is it far to your farmhouse?" said Gerrant, who was not looking happy. He was a man with whom physical discomforts reacted on his nerves; and Margaret's laugh, of which I have spoken before, grated additionally thereon. "You will catch your death of cold."

"Nearly three miles; but I shan't hurt walking quickly." she answered.

"Ah! you're used to it, you say. I can't say I rejoice in even the one mile I have to do. My hat seems to have disappeared altogether; and just look at my umbrella—hang it!" and he pointed to a bush half way down the steepest part of the incline to which the multilated fragments of his property were still hanging, and waving to and fro in the breeze in a manner at once ludicrous and melancholy. Margaret laughed again; and Gerrant felt angry with her for doing so, and d———d the whole thing without much care that the ejaculation should not reach her ears. She did not seem to notice it, however, but said in her old, abrupt way:

"Good-bye. I shall be late already. I am going."

His anger disappeared then at the idea of losing her, and he said, tenderly, that he feared she had suffered in befriending him.

"Oh, no fear of that! Nothing hurts *me*."

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"So *you* say" (reproachfully).

"And it wouldn't matter if it did."

"So you say again. I differ from you. It would—to me."

"She turned and looked full in his eyes with a fierce sort of questioning:

"Would it . . . *really?*"

"Why, of course it would," he said laughing.

"Then it matters still less to me," she answered, and, as if frightened by her own hardiness, turned abruptly away as if to go. He followed her as quickly, however, and asked if he might not see her home.

"No," Margaret said, crimsoning; her home was a long way off, and her father would not like her to bring a stranger there.

"I had forgotten we were strangers," he answered plaintively, and with a look which, after her last speech, was perhaps not unnatural.

She only turned her face frowningly away and walked on quicker.

"Might he not go part of the way with her at any rate?" he asked.

"No," she said again; "people would meet them, and she hated the Merehatch people, they talked so about everything."

To which Gerrant, thinking of her merely as a "farmer's daughter," said:

"He didn't see what harm their talking would do."

Margaret, however, thought differently, and reiterated her "No," with such a darkening look, that Gerrant, remembering that his feet were wet through already, that his lodgings lay in the opposite direction, and that he had all his painting-traps to carry, decided that the pleasure of companionship pressed against a young woman's will was not likely to counterbalance the accompanying inconveniences and professed himself reluctantly ready to obey her.

"But if I do, you will not forget your promise to finish the sittings?" he said, standing in front of her

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with his hand held out so that she could not avoid putting hers into it. "A couple more would finish it, and then——"

"And then?" she repeated quickly.

"We may count, when the Academy opens next spring, you and I, on being famous people. It all depends on you, now, and—you will not fail me?"

"No, I will not fail you," she said resolutely. "Good-bye, Mr. Gerrant."

"Good-bye, Margaret, Queen of the Storm," he said audaciously, and squeezing the hand he had held till then, he let it go, and returned to his canvas and easel.

Margaret stood for a moment where he had left her, and then resumed her way home with bent head and eyes that neither looked to the right nor to the left, like a person walking in a dream.

Ah! God, how many of Thy women-children have woke too late from even such a dream, and cursed the day on which they fell asleep in it, and the weakness which acted as their lullaby!

She could not have told herself, this girl whose whole moral and intellectual nature had been in a kind of torpor from infancy, what was the nature of the feeling which she had for a man who, till three days ago, never crossed her path. Yet from the moment that he did so, *something*, some mysterious spark in her being, had, as it were, sprung forth to meet him and hail him as a part of itself. When he looked at her the blood rushed into her face and a dazzle swam before her eyes. When he had loosened her hair or even arranged the folds of her dress, she trembled all over as though under the influence of an electric shock. The touch of his hand on hers made her pulse leap like a startled fawn. The sound of his voice was like new, strange music in her ears, compelling her to heed, and almost taking from her the power of reply that she might listen to it the longer. The daring gaze of his bold, bright eyes, the insolent freedom of his smile,

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had a beauty in them passing that of God's own sunlight to her. Who had ever looked at, spoken to, or touched her as he did? Whom had she ever known or seen for one single moment like him? No one. In all her life, not one!

And *this* was the key-note to Margaret's infatuation. Something new, something different to what she saw in her everyday life and surroundings. It might have been a happy life to many people, surroundings both fair and pleasant to most; but to her it was a drearier prison than any seven pillared Chillon, a more dismal exile than any fever-stricken marsh in Cayenne. Gifted, or cursed, from her infancy with a temperament utterly unlike either of her parents, utterly unfitted to the peaceful home in which they had cherished her; with large passions and small powers of expressing them; with a weak will and violent inclinations; with a heart at once sluggish to rouse and passionate when roused; with a sensitiveness to pain keen beyond her years, and to pleasure torpid almost to impassibility; with strong affections and stronger antipathies, hidden by a manner surly and apathetic to repellence, a manner which, mark you! was natural to her, and of which therefore she was as much unconscious as the dislike it awakened in those subjected to it would permit her to be; with a capacity for devotion and self-sacrifice passing that of many who condemned her, and a morbid pride in concealing and denying it, this girl led an inward life as entirely alone and unguessed at as though she had been an inhabitant of Central Africa instead of homely Hernecroft; and resented with a silent, ceaseless resentment the fate which had buried her in the latter place.

She was not neat or notable by nature, yet from habit and practice she could *do* any household matters required of her; and might have been the real mistress of Hernecroft and her mother's right hand if she had not hated all domestic affairs as hearttly as she did the fuss and chatter which in good Mrs. Herne were

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part and parcel of them. She was not quick or clever like her brother, but she was by no means destitute of talents, which, if cultivated, would have made her the best and healthfullest companion for him; and given her interest and occupation in her own mind. But when Robin first came home from school he had laughed at her slowness and called her "stupid" with school-boy impertinence; and Margaret, hurt and sullen, shrank into herself, neglected her books, assumed a greater dulness than she had, and from that day forth never strove to enrich her mind by one farthing-worth of knowledge more than those about her considered it their duty to force into it.

"What was the good of it?" she would ask indifferently, when rebuked on the subject. "What was the good of it?" was the question which warped her whole life: of studying, when she couldn't get a degree by it; of making herself neat and nice when there was no one to admire her, of conquering her own morbid pride and indolence, in fact, in any one way when she had no inducement stronger than duty and good feeling so to do?

And to exercise duty and good feeling in defiance of one's own nature requires the love of God to be more powerful than the love of oneself. Margaret had lived nineteen years and nine months now, and she did not even know what this love meant.

Therefore, from the difference between her own nature and the natures of those about her, between the actual life she would have liked to lead, there was a constant, speechless anger in her soul at her "fate," as she called it, in being bound to such an uncongenial lot, a constant striving and yearning to escape from it, a hunger and thirst for change, *any* change, for excitement of any sort, for admiration which did not come to her, and appreciation she would not invite, for love (so it was not the homely, fault-finding love of parents and brother), for pleasure—aye, even for pain and trial; so that these too were different from the petty,

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everyday pains and trials of her daily life. And because she could not get these, because they were as out of her reach as the sun and the moon, she would not accept or make use of those she had; but set herself sullenly against them, and went about with a secret feeling of loneliness and ill-usage, and a manner at once indifferent and self-absorbed which shut up all hearts from her.

And yet there were plenty of attractions and occupations in her own home, plenty of kind hearts and country amusements within reach to make her life as busy and happy a one as most girls could desire. The Miss Amadrews, the young ladies at the Hall, never complained of dulness, though they had been educated at a fashionable school in Brighton, and, having a large family of brothers at school, were in reality poorer and less indulged than Margaret. They would indeed have made friends with her and invited her to share in the church-decorations, and school-feasts, and energetic work among and for the poor, which, with books, and croquet, and gardening filled up every hour of their busy lives; but Margaret scorned High-churchism as she scorned anything she did not understand, turned up her nose at church-decorations as electro-plated Popery, and school feasts and poor people as wearinesses of the flesh; and so she avoided the Miss Amadrews and their society, and in consequence was not invited to their croquet-parties, and was spoken of by them as a "very odd girl, hardly like a lady, and *no* churchwoman. We would have been kind to her if we could; but it was impossible."

Ellice's coming might have mended matters if Margaret had so willed it. Indeed Mrs. Herne in lamenting her daughter's peculiarities had openly hailed the other girl's arrival as a means of "taking Margaret out of herself," and doing her good. Unfortunately, however, she had said this to the latter herself; and Margaret objecting, as many of us do, to the idea of being "done good to," disliked the idea of Ellice Devereux in

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advance, and would have disliked the girl herself even more than she did if the latter had only given her cause enough to rouse the innate passivity of her nature.

As it was, the utter difference between them was in itself provoking to her. Ellice's natural quickness of perception; her almost childlike frankness, tempered by that exquisite good-breeding and consideration which won all hearts to her; her little foreign vivacities and enthusiasms; her keen and never-flagging delight in the very country scenes and neighborhood which were to Margaret so wearily "dull, stale, flat and unprofitable;" her naturally sunny, energetic, nature, and ready adaptiveness to those about her; her impulsive actions and sensitive conscience, all of which tended to make those who were stiffest and most inimical to the Squire's daughter extend a friendly and cordial hand to his ward, were as so many poison drops in the cup of bitterness poor Margaret persisted in filling for herself from the fountain of life; while Ellice's allusions to her past life with its wild scenes and wilder adventures, her perfect yet maidenly familiarity with mankind and the world in general, even the sisterly influence she wielded over Robin, the sarcastic and fastidious, all combined to fill the poor girl with a secret passion of envy, and longing, and discontent which made her less agreeable than ever to those about her.

And it was to this nature, bitter with unsatisfied yearnings, hungry with ungratified wants, craving for what she knew not, save only that it was different from that which she had, that Nino Gerrant had come like a fiery brand cast into a deserted coal-mine, and irradiating and kindling the black and silent chamber into glowing warmth and life, growing, and spreading, and intensifying with every second.

When their eyes met in that first glance, Margaret knew that he gazed at her as no other man had ever gazed before. She carried the look away with her

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home, and her own face seemed different to her in the glass seeing that which she felt *he* had seen in it, and had been startled into admiration.

"For all that about the pencil-case was a lie," she said to herself with rugged curtness. "And he told it for *me*—not Ellice, (he never turned his eyes on her,) but me, that he might look at me again."

That look was the opening of a new page in Margaret Herne's history.

CHAPTER X.

"YOU are laughing at me, Ellice."

"*Es verdad senor*—which, translated into Irish, means 'tis true for your honor! Are you vexed with me?"

"Oh dear no. Angry? What an idea! I am only glad you are able to extract so much amusement out what is very bitter earnest to other people."

"Then you *are* vexed, or would not say that. Robin, I am sorry. I won't laugh at you again."

"Oh! that is nonsense. I must own, however, I did think you, of all people, would have been able to sympathise with me a little."

"My dear Robin, I would; but how can I, when all my sympathies in the matter are with your father?"

"With my *father!* Good Heavens!"

The exclamation was almost angrily incredulous, and the look which accompanied it still more so, as Robin wheeled round to face his companion and make sure she was not laughing at him this time also; but though Ellice colored a little, her soft eyes met his steadily and she answered:

"Indeed, yes."

"I must say I cannot see why."

"No—or you would be as sorry for him as I am."

"I am sorry enough for myself, I know," said Robin bitterly.

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"Yes." A very quiet little monosyllable, very quietly spoken, but it brought the color into Robin's face this time. They were together in the parlor, Ellice sitting in the windowseat busy mending some old lace of Mrs. Herne's, an accomplishment in which, like most Spanish women, she excelled, Robin lounging against the embrasure, newspaper in hand, looking down on her. She began to fold up her work now as though about to rise; but was checked.

"Don't run away," he said, seating himself beside her and beginning to play with the other end of her strip of lace, sure sign that he was disturbed in mind. "Tell me what you mean?"

"I think you know—no?" said Ellice gently.

"That I am consumedly selfish?"

Not exactly that. I mean that if you thought more of your father's feelings on the subject you would be as sorry for him as for yourself."

"Hardly this morning, after standing for two mortal hours in that scorching sun listening to the governor prosing about breeds of sheep and litters of pigs, and what's to be fallow land, and what next year's crops, when he knows—or ought to know—that there is nothing in this world I loathe so heartily."

"And yet it is the object of his entire life and will be yours."

"It is his certainly. I'm not so sure about mine," said Robin significantly.

"Now, I don't know what *you* mean," Ellice answered, laying down her work to look up at him.

"Simply this (you can keep confidence, can't you?), that if the governor thinks I am going to submit to be buried for life here when I leave college, to swamp myself in draining and sowing, and become a mere Downshire clod, in fact—he is mistaken; and there's an end of it."

"Surely you are not calling the Squire a 'mere Downshire clod?'" said Ellice with sufficient indignation in

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her tone to make Robin color like a child for the second time.

"No, no, of course not," he said hastily. "Bless the dear old boy! I'm not so bad as that; but—Ellice, *can't* you see?—it is different with him. He was born and bred and got his schooling here—aye, and his wife too."

"You will be fortunate if you get half as good and sweet a one," put in Ellice, the indignation still but little appeased.

"So I shall. Right you are there," said Robin cordially. "The little mother is a trump—all hail to her! but that's nothing to the purpose. *He* never went to college."

"No."

"Nor learnt to care about books and art and science, and—and all the things which make up the real soul of life."

"No; but surely, surely, Robin, because he has given you more than his father ever gave him, that is the greater reason that he should expect something from you in return for his generosity."

"Women don't understand logic, or I would ask you, Ellice, if it was not more unreasonable for a man to give you benefits only that, a little latter, you may throw them away and trample on them for his pleasure?"

"But need you throw them away? *Por cierto*, I don't see the logic of that; nor why you should make a worse Squire of Hernecroft because you have acquired tastes at Oxford to give interest and occupation to your leisure hours here."

Robin fidgeted and muttered something about "Ruskin."

"Ruskin set his disciples to dig roads, did he not?" said Ellice. "I have heard people speak of it as a *sonseria** of his; but at least it showed he does not despise labor. Robin, why do you set yourself so much

*Folly.

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against this place? It would be the pride of most men's hearts."

"My dear little friend, if you only knew how sick a man gets of it!"

"And if it were yours then, if you were your own master, you would sell it to a stranger, and go and live in London?"

"Sell *Hernecroft*? Ellice! What are you thinking of? Not quite! Why do you know how long it has been in our family, you little new country republican?"

"Yes, I know," said Ellice, smiling archly at the result of her suggestion; "and if it were *my* family and my home I should be so proud of it and love it so dearly that everything connected with it or its well-being would have a special value and poetry for me in itself; and I should like to *know* that it was flourishing under me as it had flourished under the bravest of the old Hernes, and to be able to point to its strong walls and flocks of sheep and golden cornfields as proof that the oldest house in Downshire could still hold its head higher than any other."

"And would not I too?" cried Robin, firing with the girl's enthusiasm. "Do you think I would not feel the same?"

"How could you, if you had let it drop into ruin and neglect for want of will to learn how to care for it, and had suffered every neighboring landowner to out-pass and out-do you while you were occupied with art and literature?"

"Do not speak of them so scornfully, young lady," said Robin uneasily. "They are not things to be despised."

"They are glorious things," Ellice answered warmly, "*cocas magnificas;* and there are some men to whom God gives a special talent for them, to make them the sole work and end of their lives; but it is not so with all."

"Not with me, for instance!" put in Robin. Ellice

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colored, and her eyes took a deprecatory expression very pretty to see.

"You knew best about that, and if not—is it not true that to misuse a gift, however good a one in itself, is to abuse it and turn it to an evil? Gordon would tell you, I think (Ah! how I wish you knew him!), that art and literature were given *you* to be the joy of your idle hours; not to waste on the working ones. Hernecroft is to be your life-work, Robin, if you would please your father. Why should not *they* be your life's amusements? Indeed I think you may enjoy them more, and *do* more in them, as such, than by putting them in the place of your proper vocation."

"With a companion like you!" said Robin warmly.

"I am not talking of myself," said Ellice quietly. "I don't think that you are one of those weak sort of men who want to be helped and pushed along by their women-folk."

It was on Robin's lips to say that he was not talking of his women-folk; but he was young and sensitive, and there had been something, perhaps unconsciously, repressing in Ellice's answer.

"I am not above a push from any one," he said, trying to laugh. "And as you don't want me to give up my pursuits altogether—"

"Give them up! No, indeed; why should you?"

"Only that the elements don't seem to blend well—a Downshire yeoman (for that's all we are, after all) and——"

"And a cultivated gentleman, perhaps a well-known author? Well, Robin, I don't see why one should hinder the other."

"You are so wise and sweet in all you say, child as you look, that I shall lay down my arms and agree to everything," said Robin, with a meekness which was certainly intensified by something more than womanly affection. Ellice, however, misunderstood it. Her mind was too much taken up with the matter of the argument to heed her companion's manner, and, think-

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ing he spoke in sarcasm, she answered rather warmly:

"I know I am only a girl, but out in our parts people become men and women at a time when they would be in the schoolroom here; and I have grown up among men, in wild, uncivilised places, and have seen for myself, as well as heard my mother say, that the more intellectual and cultivated a man is in himself, the better sheep-farmer and land-owner he is sure to make, and the more he will be looked up to by his rougher neighbors. In South America it is the men who have no resources in themselves that drop down lower and lower, take to drinking, and go home ruined, if they don't get their throats cut in a quarrel with the natives. Poor Uncle Henry would be a very different man if he had had your tastes and education, Robin, and dear Gordon——— Ah me, I never look at the Squire without thinking what it would be to *him* to have such a father."

"Indeed!" said Robin. The tender regretfulness in her last words stung him, falling on the present state of his feeling, and he spoke somewhat superciliously. "I should really like to see my cousin Maxwell; for, as he never seems to be out of your mind for five minutes together, I conclude he is something quite superior to the rest of us poor mortals."

"I think he is—to most," said Ellice quietly; "and I wish—*Ay de mi!* how I wish you *could* see him now, for then I should be seeing him too."

"He must have left his Jesuitry behind him then," said Robin almost roughly, "for that sort of thing won't go down here."

"He has none to leave," retorted Ellice, her eyes lightening up into sudden anger. "He is no Jesuit, and you know it. I will not talk to you, Robin, if you say things like that of Gordon."

She stood up like a little queen, and Robin faced her pale with equal anger, but something else added to it. He knew well he had been in the wrong. It was not his way, by any means, to hurt people's feelings,

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and if it had been about any one but Gordon Maxwell he would have made the *amende honorable* on the spot. A burning jealousy of this unknown cousin, however, which had been *smouldering dumbly* for some time back, checked the more generous impulse, and for the very reason that he was annoyed with himself he went on to make matters worse.

"I am sorry if I have offended you, Ellice," he said, with ironical civility; "but really I had no idea that in hazarding such a very innocent observation on my own relation I was treading on delicate ground. You should have put us *au fait* as to the state of things earlier."

"I do not understand what state of things you mean," said Ellice, still very coldly.

"Your relations with my cousin, Mr. Maxwell," replied Robin, with equal frigidity. "Of course had I known—had you given me a hint that your feelings for him——"

"Why, whom *should* I have a feelings for, if not for Gordon!" cried Ellice, as he stopped rather awkwardly.

"Only—pardon me for reminding you—*I* did not know of it," said Robin, more frigidly than before.

"If you had known him you would. No one could see him—*my* Gordon, so true, and generous, and gentle, and——"

"A ready-made saint, in fact, to spare you further eulogies," put in the Oxonian, a hot spot in either cheek. Ellice nodded her little head no whit abashed.

"As far as any living man can be a saint, I think he is," she returned, with cool defiance.

"*You* think so! Ahem! Well, all I can say is, Master Maxwell is happy in the love which can so exalt him."

"Gordon stands too high for my love to exalt him."

"Admirable Crichton! Nevertheless, needing it or not, for his exultation, there is no doubt that he *has* it."

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"Of course he has it! He—Why, Robin," breaking suddenly from indignation to entreaty, "be reasonable! Do you think that because I do not talk much about him here, because I have other friends, and love other people in their degree, that I don't value him, and miss him, and care for him more and more every day that we are parted from each other? You are all very good to me, and I am grateful, so grateful to you; but Gordon *belongs* to me. Gordon is the same to me as if he were my——"

"Don't go on. I understand now quite," said Robin, wincing as if from a blow. "I only wish I had done so earlier. However, I do not blame you, and—there is no harm done. Excuse me for anything I may have said in ignorance to offend you. I shall be more careful for the future," and crushing up the newspaper he still held in his hand, he walked out of the room and upstairs to his own.

Ellice sat down, and went on with her work rather startled.

"Robin is vexed," she thought to herself. "He never speaks in that tone unless he is really angry. I'm afraid I got rather hot. Gordon would have said so; but I can't bear any one to sneer at him, and Robin least of any who is so good-natured usually; and who I thought would make such a nice friend for him if they once got to know one another. I shouldn't wonder now if I have prevented that very thing by my own hastiness. If he would only come back quickly I would tell him I was too warm."

But Robin did not come back, and as Margaret had taken herself out for one of her solitary rambles, Ellice darned away uninterruptedly.

"I am afraid he is really hurt," she thought by-and-by, with a most childish sinking of the heart. "Usually, if he goes off in a little huff it is over in a moment, and he is back and eager to make it up again. It couldn't have been about Gordon alone. He would only laugh at me at worst for that. It

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must have been my lecturing him about his father. Of course I had no right to do so, but the Squire did look so sorry and disappointed when Robin would only yawn and fidget, instead of listening and being interested about the farm. Perhaps I ought not to have said anything, though. I forget that it is only their kindness that keeps me here, and that I have no right to queen it as I did at the estancia. *Ay de mi!* it is very nice to be petted and obeyed, and make much of, but it spoils one sadly for afterwards," and a sudden, unexpected drop fell with a little *splash* on the work over which Ellice's head was bent. Brushing *it* hurriedly away, and glancing round with the startled air of a person not used to cry, and afraid of being caught in the weakness, the perfect silence around her struck her with a sense of her own solitude, and made her lay aside her work and go out into the hall.

The whole house seemed very quiet, that warm, slumbrous quiet of a midsummer's day in the country. A faint smell of steam and soapsuds proclaimed the fact of its being washing-day in the back premises, and the occasional murmur of voices from those parts, or the shadow of a figure thrown on the sunscorched flags in the yard, testified to the fact that there were other human beings in the building besides herself; but the Squire was as usual busy on the farm, Mrs. Herne superintending her house-maidens, Margaret out, no one knew where; and no sound came from Robin's room, the door of which had been closed with no great gentleness half an hour previously. Somehow a great sense of loneliness came over the slender little girl standing there in her black dress, gazing out into the still, hot garden, the still, hot country beyond. These people—they were all very good to her—they gave her bed, and board, and lodging, but, as she said, they did not belong to her; they were neither her kith nor kin; they had no need of her. If she were to disappear from among them to-morrow it would make no difference to them. Nothing would be changed. The

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farm, the housekeeping, Margaret's strange, self-absorbed life, would all go or as smoothly as usual. Even Robin would hardly miss her among his books and friends, those friends who, he had once hinted to her, were not given to scolding him as she did, or pointing out spots in the sun of his perfections.

"That is why the spots have grown so numerous," she had answered him saucily at the time; but now, before that noonday stillness and the severity of the Oxanian's closed door, their quarrel assumed another aspect, and Ellice told herself she had been forward and impertinent, right in what she said, but wrong in saying it. Gordon had told her once 'silence was golden." Why had she not remembered it? What a little prig Robin must think her, to go away and leave her to herself in this way!

And here another drop rolled down the smooth, girlish cheek, and fell on the bosom of her black dress. If Robin had only opened the door and come down then, his anger must surely have melted away before the gleam of those wet, wistful eyes; but no, he was lying face downwards on his bed, with the door locked, and his head buried in his folded arms, as if to prevent the very flies from guessing at the moisture in his own hot, aching eyes; and there came no sound from above to tell Ellice that he was not busy at his writing, finishing an essay on the relative merits of two American poets, and forgetful of the very existence of the girl who had annoyed him, and who he knew had no companion save himself when Margaret was not at home.

Sore and sorrowful, Ellice left the house and wandered out through the garden into the orchard, where the heavily-laden branches of the old fruit trees made a pleasant, waving shadow on the grass, and the perfume of wall-flowers, mignonette, and tall queen lilies came with a fainter sweetness through the high quickset hedge which divided this domain from the old-fashioned parterres beyond. There was one hoary monarch of the apple tribe whose gnarled and knotty

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boughs fairly swept the buttercups which spangled the turf with golden coins beneath them. Ellice crept between the leafy entanglement of some of the lesser branches and found herself in a low green tent, through which the sunlight filtered on her upturned face in an emerald rain infinitely refreshing after the dazzle without. There was no glare here; the long grass was cool and soft, and she could lie back on it, resting her head against the mossy roots of the tree and dreaming of that distant home now lost to her for ever; of the town-house with its marble courtyard set round with flowering shrubs, and lofty rooms, whose doors and windows, shielded from the sun by green venetians, stood open one end of the house to the other the livelong day; the house where they lived in those days when gentle Mrs. Devereux wore no widow's cap, and when there was a handsome, bearded father, never too busy with his politics and civil engineering to pet and play with his baby daughter, the one child of the house; where Gordon, too, used to come up from the estancia to stay with them that he might attend a day-school kept by the French Basque fathers across the broad, sun-dazzled plaza; with its rows of milky-blossomed acacia-trees planted in diagonal lines to afford shade to the passers-by, the home where all that early happiness came to an end with darkened windows one day and a funeral on the next; and Gordon's mother, Aunt Emily, coming up to the town in the dusty old native *diligencia* and taking her widowed sister and orphan niece back to the estancia with her to live with Uncle Harry and be cared for.

Poor Aunt Emily? It was little more than a couple of years before the new home to which she took them knew herself no more. Anxieties were already rife at at the estancia. Her husband had begun to fall into irregular habits; four children had been buried in four successive years among the dry, yellowish grass at a little distance from the house. Another was expected, but by the time it came the mother's heart, torn by a

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violent quarrel between her tipsy husband and his head man on the previous evening, was already beating itself out in the last, faint pulsations of death. The yellow grass in that tiny, enclosure, railed off that the sheep might not trample it down, was again disturbed to receive a double burden; and Mrs. Maxwell's dying prayer to her husband that Gordon might not be allowed to grow up in those uncivilised wilds, but be sent home to an English school, deprived Ellice of her childhood's hero and companion before another year was out. She was nearly fourteen then, and from her want of all youthful associates precociously womanly in many things. She grew more so after her boyish friend and idol had departed; and she was left to be her mother's sole companion, the little princess of the estancia, the object of all chivalrous service and attention from every male visitor (and there were no others who came to the estancia;) and the only person whose pretty coaxing had influence to stay Mr. Maxwell even for a moment in his downward course; or to whom, no matter how rough or excited he might get with others, he had never said a harsh or an unkind word.

Nineteen years of life, life tossed about in strange places and among strange people, life too often troubled by bitter partings, and made sorrowful by salt tears; but never a useless life, never an unimportant one, never from her babyhood, one which even in its innocence and helplessness had not been the one bright star of those to whom it belonged, the centre of tenderness and attraction for all around her—a life gone from her now as utterly, and buried as deeply behind those six thousand miles of salt ocean tumbling between her and it as though the Ellice of those days, the *senorita* of the estancia, the *high de mi alma* of the fast-living estanciero, were a different being to this black-frocked girl lying on English grass, and wiping away her uncared-for tears under an English apple-tree, this Ellice Devereux who was Squire Herne's ward and had a home in his house, but was nothing in

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particular to him or any one belonging to him, and had no nearer tie to life on this side of the Atlantic than a certain grave young man in London who had solemnly married himself to her at six years old by the aid of an old curtain ring, had called her *mujercita** till he was eleven; and had never yet suffered any girl or woman to oust her from the chief place in his affections.

Ellice was naturally of a clinging disposition, kindness and affection came as easily to her to take as to give; and the very changes and chances of her past life had predisposed her to take this one simply and cheerfully. To-day, however, her real loneliness and bereavement pressed upon her with a sudden bitterness as fresh and hard to bear as on the day when her mother's coffin was carried to the English cemetery; and the big hot drops fell faster and faster from her eyes with an abandonment to which she would never have given way could she, for one moment, have traced their root to the banging of a door by a mortified young Oxonian an hour or so *beforehand*.

Needless to say, however, such an idea never ocurred to her. Had it done so it would have seemed like a desecration, or at any rate an impertinence stinging enough to have dried up every tear in her *head*. To Ellice, indeed, reared among men and utterly unused to connecting friendship or even affection for them with the English term "falling in love," such an idea could never have occurred unless suggested from without. No, she was alone, an orphan with no one belonging to her, and dependent on strangers for the kindness she received; and if it was to one of these "strangers" more than another that her thoughts recurred at the present moment, it was to Margaret instead of Margaret's brother: Margaret, who might have been a friend and sister to her, but who of late had seemed to shrink even more from her than she had done in the beginning, would sit by herself in the

* Little wife.

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garden after dusk, and wander off almost daily for rambles in which she never invited companionship, and indeed seemed to dislike it so much when offered that Ellice had ceased, during the last few days, to press it on her.

"She always walked alone before I came," the younger girl thought uneasily, "and I suppose she does not like me well enough to *stand* having me for a constant companion. I should have liked another girl at the estancia, but I am different. Ah! if I had a home of my own!" And there the tears would have gushed afresh, but just then a bird hidden somewhere in the green, ruddy-fruited temple above her burst forth into such a strain of song, so pure and sweet and joyous, that Ellice checked her sobs and closed her swollen eyes to listen. And the bird sang on clearly and gaily as though there were never another bird without a nest in all the world, and the sun fell in long broken waves of gold upon the daisy-sprinkled grass brightly as if in that same world there were no spot so dark and dreary its rays could never penetrate them; and the bees kept up a drowsy murmur among the scented limes and over the white foam of meadow-sweet and red-lipped daisies; but Ellice's tears had ceased to flow, and the long lashes lay still as a silken shadow on her pale, smooth cheek. The slumbrous beauty of the summer's day had proved too much for a young heart's trouble; and the girl lay sleeping peacefully upon the warm, clover-scented grass.

CHAPTER XI.

ELLICE woke up quite suddenly. There was a murmur of voices in her ears, a voice which said something in which the name Margaret mingled, and a voice like that of Margaret herself answering:

"Not to-morrow. And go back now. You should not have come so far. Suppose any one saw——"

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And then a man's laugh, low and teasing, and a murmur lower yet; and Ellice was sitting up, broad awake and rubbing her eyes as she wondered how long she had slept. A long time, she thought, for the sun was low on the horizon, and as she parted the boughs and came out from her green tent she saw that the shadows of the trees stretched long and black across the golden grass. The air was full of sweet scents and a freshness as of upturned earth; and borne on it from the distant meadows came the lowing of the cattle as they were being driven up to the shed for milking. There was no one besides herself in the orchard; no one, so far as she could see, in the lane on the other side of the hedge. Ellice thought that she must have been dreaming of the two voices; and wondered why the man's should have reminded her of something vaguely unpleasant.

Her trouble had vanished with her wakening. It was evidently tea-time, and probably Robin had been searching for her; for of late he had taken to giving her a German lesson before tea. Mrs. Herne, too, might have been wanting her. It was silly and ungrateful to have been crying her eyes out for nothing; or only because she had been left alone a little when, after all, that very fact proved how completely she was treated as one of the family. And oh! suppose her eyes should still be red and any one notice them!

This thought caused her to linger a moment or two longer before leaving the orchard; but happening to glance round the garden as she passed through it, her eyes fell on Margaret quietly seated in the old, ivy-covered arbor at the *bottom* of the walk reading a book. She had no hat or jacket on; nor showed any sign of having recently returned from a walk. Indeed her head was bent over the volume with the absorption of one completely buried in the subject; and she started when Ellice spoke to her.

"Why, Margaret, I haven't seen you all day."

"Where have you been?" asked Margaret. "You're

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not coming from the house, and yet you look as if you had been asleep."

"So I have, under a tree in the orchard. I went out there about three o'clock, it was so hot, and fell asleep. It was your voice, I think, woke me."

"Hardly. I haven't been out there; or speaking at all," said Margaret shortly.

"Didn't you come in a few minutes back; or did I dream it? I thought I heard you speaking to some one in the lane at the *bottom* of the orchard."

"Certainly you were dreaming: I have been home I don't know how long, and sitting here by myself ever since."

Margaret spoke rather roughly, and with a sort of sullen suspicion in her eyes; and Ellice, who was not at all sure if she had been awake or not, changed the subject by asking where Robin and the others were.

"There is the tea-bell: so I suppose they are waiting for us," Margaret answered, and dropping her book, rather surprised Ellice by taking the latter's arm as they turned to enter the house.

The Squire and his wife were, as she surmised, already seated at table, but not Robin. There was no sign of him, as Ellice saw at a glance, and she was glad when in answer to her guardian's greeting—"Well, my maids, we'm just thinking ye were minded to sup on flowers and sunshine"—Margaret answered:

"We didn't know it was so late! but where is Robin? Shall I call him?"

"Nay, dear, no need; he's not at home," said Mrs. Herne quietly. "He came down from his room ten minutes agone and said he had read himself into a bad headache, and would take the cob and ride over to Coniston Beeches to take tea wi' the curate there. Ellice lovey, thy face is burnt by the sun; 't'as given thee quite a color."

Ellice's color deepened; but she only smiled in answer. So Robin had not missed her after all! but had stayed in his room all the afternoon and had gone out

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now, forgetting that he had promised to give Margaret and herself a drive in the dogcart that evening. A curious feeling of depression stole over her, and her voice, usually the most fluent of the party, was hardly heard at all before supper was concluded. She took her sewing afterwards, and sat down quietly at Mrs. Herne's knee, keeping so still there that by-and-by a motherly hand was laid on her head, and the good woman asked:

"Has the sun given this child a headache too? Thou art not wont to sit so silent of ordinary, Ellice."

Ellice shook her head and tried to rouse herself; and Mrs. Herne once started began to prattle on about her old friends Emily and Amy, and of how poor Harry was getting on in foreign parts, a fruitful theme for conversation before which Ellice's silent mood was fain to take wings to itself and disappear. That Margaret should sit by, neither speaking nor seeming to listen, was nothing out of the common; but by-and-by her father spoke to her.

"An' where did you an' Ellice walk to to-day, my lass?"

"Across the downs," said Margaret, without looking up, "to Gayt's farm. I wanted some cochin-china eggs."

"Eh? what's come to your own fowls? But I'm glad ye went there, wenches; for Gayt's black cattle were a sight for Ellice to see. I doubt ye've met none like them in your parts, my maid."

"Ellice didn't go," said Margaret, reddening; "I went there by myself."

"Nay, then, Ellice lovey, did 'ee stay in to darn that lace of mine!" put in Mrs. Herne, so anxiously that Ellice turned up her little face with a reassuring smile.

"No, auntie I've been idling in the orchard all the afternoon, and your lace isn't finished yet. I did not know you were going out, Margaret, or I would have gone too."

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"You were talking to Robin, and I knew you would think it too far for you. You *know* you can't bear a good long walk," said Margaret with a little unnecessary heat.

The Squire looked annoyed.

"You should make choice o' shorter ones then, my girl; 'twould be civiller an' more courteous when ye've a guest-maiden staying with you. An' as for Rob, he'd be better fitted wi' doing something useful, instead o' waisting his time in talk wi' womenfolk."

"Nay then, father, don't 'ee be vexed wi' Robin," put in Mrs. Herne, most gratefully for both girls; "'tis but young he is yet. When he comes to leave college an' settle down he'll buckle to 't like a man, see if he dont!"

"He doesn't show much sign of it now," said the Squire, angrily. "I'd half a mind to tell him this morning he might pack up his traps at college, an' take his name off the books; as, if Latin and Greek were to make him nought but a finnified mounseer, too grand an' good-for-nothing to give a care to the well-doin' of his own home, I'd ha' no more of 'em, that I wouldn't."

"Oh, but they don't do that, Squire," cried Ellice, as her guardian broke off, very red in the face, and bringing down his fist with a crash on the little table beside him. "He was only saying to me to-day that he took as much pride and interest in the old place as any of his forefathers had ever done."

"He never said as much to me," grumbled the Squire, a new cause for gloom chasing away the mollified look which had begun to spread over his features; "but my Rob's a fine young man, Maid Ellice, too fine to talk on such matters wi' a poor old Saxon churl like his father. I mun get his opinions, if I want 'em, from a stranger lass at my own table. 'Tis all the world afor his own father wi' Mounseer Robert."

"Nay, nay, master, don't 'ee talk that way, don't 'ee now," pleaded Mrs. Herne, beginning to cry, while Margaret lifted her face and said:

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"He never says a word to me either, father; it's only to Ellice he talks in that way."

Ellice felt rather ill-used. She could not turn on Margaret and say, "And that is only because I talk to him and you don't," nor on the Squire and tell him that Robin's expression of his feelings respecting the place had been wrung from him by her own indignant remonstrance. She spoke then to serve his father; she had spoken now to serve him; and each time with an equally unfortunate result. Why could she not learn to hold her tongue, she who was only a "stranger lass at their table?" It was a balm and comfort quite unhoped for when Mrs. Herne said:

"Indeed, an' he told me the other day 'twas because Ellice cared so much for Hernecroft and everything about us that he liked to talk to her. They both take after me in the likin' for a bite o' chat; an' wi' Maggie so silent like, the lassie would be lonesome but for Robin to amuse her."

"And what for should Margaret be silent?" said the Squire, turning angrily on his daughter. "Hast no tongue to talk with, or no brains to fashion talk, that a wench o'your own age, an' all, must sit by herself alone, or be fain to depend on Robin's havers?"

"Robin's 'havers' are pleasanter than my talk," said Margaret as angrily. "What *should* I have to say when I have never been out in the world like Ellice or he; or been anywhere, or seen anything to talk about? Brains? Who *could* have any brains, buried here?"

It was a most unexpected outburst. To Robin indeed, or even to Ellice once or twice, Margaret had flashed out in anger or complaint against her home; but these occasions had been very rare, and her parents were in total ignorance of them. It fell like a thunderbolt on the Squire now. His ruddy face grew positively pale, and the broad, knotted hand he stretched out to his wife trembled like an invalid's.

"*Buried* here!" he said, after a moment's silence, and in a voice rendered pathetic by its hoarseness and

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simplicity. "'*Who could ha' brains, buried here!*' Mother art thou an' I getting into our second childhood? Tell un, Maggy woman, tell un truly, an' we'm bear it together. Better that than sit here in our sober sense an hear a child born of ourselves, our very own flesh an' blood, speakin' words like that'n o' the place of her birth."

"Father dear, the child didn't mean it, don't 'ee think it," cried Mrs. Herne, pressing her husband's hand tight between her own soft, warm palms, and crying for sympathy. "She was just in a pet, an' spoke wi'out thinking, didn't 'ee, Maggie love?" But Margaret had got up and left the room before the Squire had finished speaking; and Ellice rose softly and followed her, unable to bear the silence which followed Mrs. Herne's appeal. There was no sign of the other girl, however, to be seen; but the front door stood open, and the moonlight lay white and cool upon the stone-flagged entry. Ellice slipped out, and, guided by a sort of instinct, ran down the garden to the old arbour, where sure enough she again discovered the object of her search, crouched on the ground, with her face hidden in her arms on the bench, and weeping, as Ellice thought by the sound of a smothered sob; though at the first sound of an approaching footstep she sprang to her feet and retreated into the darkest corner of the place.

"Margaret," said Ellice, halting on the outside, with a timidity which was justified by the sharp answer:

"Well, what do you want?"

"The Squire is so troubled at what you said. Of course you didn't mean it; but you know how he loves you, and——Maggie dear, won't you just go back and tell him so?"

"No; for I did mean it, and I am not going to tell lies for——for everybody," said Margaret with a sudden faltering and rush of color which, had it been lighter, might have attracted Ellice's notice. As it was, the latter only answered her coaxingly:

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"But you wouldn't like to hurt him, Margaret! and he thinks so much of you."

"He does not. No one thinks or cares anything for me here. No one? And, Ellice," coming a little out of the shadow, and speaking threateningly, "I won't have you sent to meddle or interfere with me. I don't pretend to have fine company talk or soft speeches like you; and those who like you better for them can have you. But let me alone at any rate. I've a right to that, and I mean to have it."

"Margaret, would you like it better if I did not live here?" said Ellice wistfully, her eyes filling with tears which glimmered softly in the moonlight; but Margaret faced her quite unmoved.

"It makes no difference to me whether you live here or not, so that you leave me in peace when I ask you," she answered stubbornly; and the tone was so resolute that Ellice had no resource but to return to the house as she came. Her ill success smote her, however, as she returned and saw Mrs. Herne watching for her at the door with a face divided between anxiety and hopefulness.

"Have you been after Maggie, dearie?"

"Yes, auntie, but——"

"Aye, aye, I know," for Ellice had broken off uncertain how to finish without hurting the mother's feelings more. "I could ha' told you 'twas no use. Maggie never would give in from a babe, no, not if 'twas ever so; but do'ee, like a good child, go in to the master an' say a soothing word to him. Do 'ee, Ellice lovey! He's been sore put out to-day, first by Robin and now by Maggie, an' they don't mean it, you know, neither one o' them; but he pays no heed to me when I say so. He thinks 'tis just because I'm their mother."

"But you are right, auntie. Robin didn't mean anything, I know. You should have heard how lovingly he was speaking of the Squire and you afterwards," said Ellice, comforting and comforted as she rested her

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soft little cheek against the mother's shoulder. Mrs. Herne beamed all over.

"There then! Didn't I tell 'ee so? I knew the dear boy's heart, bless it! was as good as gold. An' I dare say he was mad wi 'imself for vexing his father. He looked terrible down-hearted when he went out this evening. And do you go in an' tell master so, like a love. Make haste, for he'll believe it from you."

But Ellice did not think so, and hung back with very crimson cheeks and unaffected reluctance. She had not forgotten the Squire's own words earlier that evening, and had a great dislike to the idea of being thought forward or presuming upon their kindness. Mrs. Herne interrupted her impatiently.

"Kindness! Hut-t't! you are here because I loved your mother, Elly child, an' she loved me; an' 'twas a kindness of her an' brother Harry to send you home to me. 'Tis you ought to feel just like one o' our own selves by this time. Indeed, an' I'm sure Robin's as fond of you as if he were your own brother. I never saw him take to any one so; and he an' Margaret'd do as much for you any day if 'twas you in trouble; so run in now to father, lovey, and comfort him a bit. Those pretty ways of yours have a wonderful knack o' putting him in a good humor at most times."

And so urged Ellice had nothing for it but to obey, though it was with anything but a confident heart or step that she entered the dining-room. The first sight of the Squire, however, huddled up in his armchair by the fireless grate, as though he had even turned away from the pretence of looking over the papers which were scattered about the table at his back, drove all thoughts of herself, or what others might think of her, from Ellice's mind. He had been hurt, and there was no one to heal the hurt but she; and she went up quickly and softly to his side and laid her little hand on his shoulder.

He had not heard her enter, and the light touch

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made him start and turn round eagerly. Then—and Ellice saw it with a little pang which was not the less sorrowful for the naturalness and inevitability of the thing—the light which had come into his face died out of it as suddenly, and he said, in a voice harsh with disappointment:

"*You*, is it, lass? I thought 'twas Margaret. An' what's the matter? Is it you fretting now at being buried alive in an old farmhouse, an' wantin' to be off an' away? Go, with God's will, an' you like. You've folks o' your own, Maid Ellice, as 'll be glad to take ye, I don't doubt."

"Don't, Squire?" cried Ellice pleadingly, but passing over the attack on herself. "You oughtn't to talk that way when you know Margaret only spoke hastily. She was angry, and she didn't think what she was saying."

"Angry! an' what, pray, angered her?" asked the Squire, in a voice of sufficient wrath to make many girls flinch. Ellice, however, kept her place bravely.

"Why, because of what you said," she answered, carrying the war into the enemy's quarters with an intuitive perception that the Squire would far rather have himself to blame in the matter than his daughter. "You know that she is naturally silent, and so are you too, Squire. Why, you often sit ever so long without talking; and it hurt her to think that you laid it on her being too stupid to talk. Margaret is not stupid, Squire, and she knows it, and you know it, and it made her angry and hasty in answering, that was all."

"Silent! Why, of course we are silent people. The Saxons never were a chatting, magpie set, Maid Ellice," retorted the Squire warmly; "and Margaret's a true Saxon in that, an' takes after her father as she should do. Not that I blame you for your glib tongue, my little lass. Faith, I like it well enow in *you;* an' besides, 'tis no fault of yours, but the Norman blood in your veins; but Margaret's no Norman wench, Maid Ellice, an' thinks more than she says."

"Yes, indeed," said Ellice, with an irrepressible

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laugh in her eyes at the way in which the Squire had veered round to her side. "And it was for that very reason, being your own daughter and loving you as she does, that it hurt her to be blamed for what was just her likeness to you and the——the Saxon women!"

"Eh, lass, but who blamed her? Not I; or if I did, 'twas but a chance word in haste like, an' need a maid hurt her father back again for that?" answered the Squire, with such a sorrowful fall in his voice that Ellice was fain to drop on her knees by him, and have recourse to her first pleading.

"She never meant it either. I'm sure she didn't. She was crying about it just now when I went to look for her. Don't think of it any more, Squire, don't?" and she lifted such a persuasive little face to the old man that he was suddenly moved to take it between his hard hands and kiss it, a mark of affection most unwonted with the Downshire yeoman, as he said:

"Bless thee, child! 'Tis a good heart thou hast. An' crying was she! Nay, then, go and tell her not to fret, for I'll never think more on't. I knew my lass was not one to cut her own father knowingly; an' after all, it stands to reason that she couldn't love any place as well as this when she's never known any other. Could she now, my maid? I wish 'twas so wi' Robin, but——"

"Indeed, Squire, I'm sure Robin is quite as fond——" Ellice began hastily, but was checked by a big finger laid upon her lips.

"Sht! my lass; hold there, an' leave well alone The ways o' young men are best left to their elders, whether for good or evil. But Robin Herne's too fine, by half, for thee or me to understand, Maid Ellice, an' we mun just bow to his lordship, an' keep at arm's length. God help th' old place when th' old man's gone, that's all?"

Ellice felt distressed In her secret heart she was far more sure of Robin's affection for his home than of Margaret's, and was equally so that her power of

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understanding the former was infinitely superior to the latter. The few words said in the earlier part of the evening, however, tied her tongue, and Robin would have been gratified had he known how very impatiently a certain young heart was beating for him to come in and clear himself of snobbishness and unfilial indifference in his father's eyes.

He did not know, however, and Ellice's impatience was wasted; for it was not till a full hour after she had gone up to her own room that night that the rapid hoof-strokes of the roan cob were heard clattering faintly in the far distance, and gradually growing nearer and nearer, along the long stretch of road which showed like a waving line of white riband in the sharp brilliancy of the moonbeams. How it happened that Ellice was not in bed, as she ought to have been, I cannot tell; nor why the young heart should beat so fast behind its white night-dress as, kneeling by the window, she peeped through an infinitesimal cranny in the curtains at the approaching horseman. Perhaps, however, the Oxonians's unwonted length of absence had terrified her into thinking that some accident might have happened to him far more distressing than any little outbreak of temper or indifference (an idea not so absurd in a South American girl, who had watched whole nights with her mother in prayer and agony lest the man of the house might at any time be brought home with his throat cut, or a bullet between his ribs from the nearest *pulperia**), for as she saw the dark, familiar figure spring from the saddle. throw the reins over the horse's neck, and proceed to lead off the animal to its stable, a sigh of relief, which was half a smile, crossed the girl's lips, and with a murmured word, "It will be all right to-morrow," she sprang lightly into bed, and nestling down among the cool, lavender-scented sheets, like a ladybird hidden in the petals of a rose, was sound asleep before five minutes

* Wayside wine-shop, or inn.

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CHAPTER XII.

ELLICE was habitually an early riser, a custom obligatory on South American sheep-farms owing to the intense heat of the later morning hours; therefore there was nothing out of the way in her being down betimes on the following day and wandering about the garden watering, clipping and tying up the flowers for a good hour before the bell rang for the eight o'clock breakfast.

Generally Robin came down early too, and would pursue her out among the roses and geraniums and bring her back, a flushed and rebellious captive, to give him a lesson in Spanish, during which Margaret would sit by wondering at Ellice for "giving in to his whims and taking so much trouble for what *could* be no good to him, as he was neither going to Spain nor South America;" but to-day, though Ellice heard him moving about his room sometime before she left her own, there was no sign of him in the garden, and it was not until, in answer to the big bell's noisy summons, she was hurrying in to take her seat at table, that she saw him sitting quietly in the window-seat playing with his rough Scotch terrier. He *had* come down then (within the last few minutes at any rate), and, though sitting within sight of her, had not even troubled himself to come out and "give her good-morrow." Her heart sank all of a sudden to a perfectly ridiculous and unaccountable depth. Surely he was not going to keep up the disagreement with her to-day which had arisen from so trifling a cause on the previous morning! Yet it seemed like it, and in a way not easy to take hold of; for he rose at once when she came in, treading closely on her guardian's footsteps, and said:

"Good-morning, father. Good-morning, Ellice," in a tone in which only a few nice observers could have

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detected any variation between the one salutation and the other. *Was* there any variation indeed after all? A slight fall in the voice, perhaps, an almost imperceptible accentuation of the syllables in the latter greeting —surely the most hypercritical could hardly pay heed to a trifle so minute; yet Ellice's sensitive face flushed and her eyes fell, and the veriest stranger might have smiled at the contrast between the Squire's gruff, loud-spoken "Morning, Rob. Only just up, heh?" and the young girl's voiced "Good-morning—Robin" uttered with a decided break between the two words as of timidity or irresolution. She never looked up or she would have seen Robin's face pale and stiffen on the moment.

They all sat down immediately afterwards. Breakfast was, of all others, the meal which the Squire most disliked to have delayed or lingered over; and if there had been a doubt before as to something being amiss with Robin, it became a palpable fact now to everybody. In the first place he was dressed with an accurate, almost clerical trimness, sufficiently different from his usual morning costume to provoke immediate comment. In the second, he was scrupulously polite to his parents, and only spoke when the civilities of the table required it. In the third, he never looked at or addressed Ellice at all; and this, in a young man whose morning meal was more taken up in lively talk and repartee with the above named damsel than in eating or attending to the rest of the party, was sufficiently noticeable in a family where each spoke out his or her thoughts, and commented with unfashionable directness and acumen on the appearance and behaviour of the others. Robin, with his greater knowledge of the world and its outward *bienseances*, had more than once complained of this practice. He was called upon to suffer from it now with vengeance.

"Art not well, Rob dearie?" said Mrs. Herne, her round face full of maternal anxiety as she leant across the table to glance from her son's face, paler and

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graver than its wont, to his neglected plate. "Maggie, pass him the marmalade. He's eating nothing."

"'Tis the smell o' the varmyard takes away his appetite," said the Squire roughly. "Never mind, son Robert! Thou art more i' the fashion not to eat than to go filling thy belly wi' good meat and drink like us vulgar country folk."

Robin's face flushed; but he kept his temper. Could he have seen the sudden pained appealing glance directed at the Squire from a pair of blue-grey eyes across the table, he might have been considerably assisted thereby. As it was, he answered with a commendable civility which almost frightened his mother.

"I am making a very good breakfast, thank you, sir. Will you let me pass your cup, Margaret?"

"Are you going out anywhere that you are so fine?" asked Margaret, merely shaking her head at the proffered attention. "It does make you look so queer, Robin."

"Does it?" he said shortly; then recollecting himself—"I beg your pardon, what did you ask me? Yes, I am going—away for a day or two."

"*Going away!*" cried mother and sister in a breath, while Ellice's eyes remained fixed on her plate, and a mite of bread which she had just put in her mouth seemed suddenly to grow to ten times its size and all but choke her. "We thought you were not going to Scarborough till the beginning of next month."

"Just so, and I am not going there, but to a college chum in Devonshire. He asked me some time back to run down and spend a few days with him, and I wrote yesterday to say I would."

"But too glad t' escape from Farmer Herne's harvest talk an' the sight o' the crops wi'out which there'd be no college for thee, nor 'chums' either," put in the Squire dryly. Again Robin's color rose; but a second time he mastered himself and only answered with that

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new-born gravity which sat so strangely on the natural brightness and mobility of his face.

"No, sir, and I know you are only joking when you say so."

"'Tis no joke to me that my only son despises the home that gave him birth once, and food and living still," retorted the Squire, glad to burst out with his grievance of the previous day, and speaking somewhat huskily. To the great surprise of every one Robin pushed back his plate, and going up to him laid his hand on his father's shoulder.

"I don't despise it," he said, looking down into the old man's red and angry face with a gentleness which rather awed the Squire. "I should be an arrant snob if I did; and I don't think its likely *your* son would be that. If you're going to the fields now I'll walk there too, for I want to speak to you; and I mayn't have another opportunity before I go."

"Lasses dear," said Mrs. Herne tremulously, and only waiting for the door to close on the two men as they went out together; "there's summat sorely amiss wi' our Rob. He'd never have spoke to the master that way otherwise; and he so sharp wi' his tongue customary days. Is he sickening for ought, think you, dears? It'd break my heart to fancy it, but just look to his plate? He's scarce touched a bit the whole meal."

"And he never spoke to Ellice at all," said Margaret, turning her great eyes on the girl in question. "Have you been quarrelling with him, Ellice? He'd not be so civil to father and us, though, if you had."

"No, I have not quarrelled with him," said Ellice slowly. It was true she had not; and yet through all her pulses she felt that *he* had quarrelled with her, and would have given much to know the reason why. Mrs Herne turned to her anxiously.

"Deed I hope not, lovey. He and you fit each other so well of ordinary. Maggie——" in a half-whisper to her daughter—"I do hope 'tis not Miss Amadrew."

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"Oh no, I think not," said Margaret aloud, while Ellice rebuked herself for a quick feeling of eager curiosity. "He hasn't been there for ever so long."

"Her father would never hear of it," said Mrs. Herne, shaking her head.

"Nor Lady Amadrew. Be sure of that!" said Margaret, tossing hers. "They think us—oh! *miles* beneath them."

"Nay, now, dearie, that's just your fancy. I'm sure Lady Amadrew was most kind when she first came, and before she grew such an invalid; and the Miss Amadrews have driven over twice in the last three weeks."

"Yes—to see Ellice! She's more elegant than we are, and suits them better."

"Oh! Maggie!" cried Ellice, and pained and coloring; "all she wanted of me was to get me to help in decorating the schoolhouse for the children's feast."

"Rather you than I there?" said Margaret indifferently; but there was an anxious, vexed look in her face underlying the subject of the dialogue; and after a moment she burst out: "Mother, it's *very* disagreeable of Robin going off to Devonshire this way. What can he be doing it for?"

"I thought you hadn't expected him to stay here as long as he has done," Ellice suggested; though indeed the same question was troubling herself; but Margaret only muttered something to herself, and went out of the room with a face even more gloomy than its wont. Mrs. Herne had her own household matters to attend to, but lingered a moment in her desire for sympathy.

"I suppose there is nothing seriously wrong wi' the dear lad, Elly? You don't think he could be going to be sick, an' us not know, do you?"

"No, indeed, auntie," said Ellice readily; and then, seeing the wistful look still in the mother's eyes; "I think—from what he said—that he was vexed with himself for paining the Squire yesterday. And was it not very nice to hear him speak *so* to his father? I thought you would have been pleased!"

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"Pleased!" echoed Mrs. Herne. "It was just too beautiful for life; for Robin has a pert tongue by nature, Ellice dear, an' I doubt me I didn't check it enough when he was a wee thing. Eh, if that's all, there's not much to mind. Maggie! Maggie! where are you? Come an' help me pack Robbie's bag for him; and—Maggie—bring a ball of fine string. I want you to tie down the peach preserves afterwards.' And the good woman trotted off to her *hausfrau* duties above stairs with a mind far more satisfied than the girl she left behind her.

"And yet it *was* good and sweet and noble of him," Ellice thought with that pardonable exaggeration women are fond of applying to the merits of the stronger sex. "I never liked him so much as when he did it. Surely it is very pettish and selfish to be hurt because he didn't speak to *me*."

It might be so; yet it was natural into the bargain; and certainly, though she would not have acknowledged it, would indeed have asserted with a most honest belief in her own truth that she had had no such idea, it was with an unavowed hope that he might come in from the field by-and-by and heal the hurt he had inflicted, that she lingered in the parlor occupying herself with some feminine embroideries in place of volunteering to assist in the tying up of the preserves above stairs. He would not stay long in the hot sun among the gathering crops; and if he saw her at the window as he came in, it would be only natural to stop and——

And what? Ah! had Ellice even thought the thoughts so far mentioned I might have followed them to an end; but the brain and the consciousness of human beings are curious things; and one of their most curious properties is, that we not frequently carry into positive action the due sequence of thoughts no single germ of which has (so far as we are cognisant) entered into our minds, or been accepted by our will. So far as she *knew*, she was not even watching

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for Robin at all as she sat in the window with her work, but was rather very anxious to finish it, and wholly occupied with devising a tendril of her own imagination, that would improve the pattern of the whole, and make it even more perfect for the end for which it was intended: namely a handkerchief for Mrs. Herne, and which Miss Amadrew, taking into consideration the very obvious fact that lace handkerchiefs were of all things the most inappropriate and useless to the Squire's homely wife, had already pointedly pronounced it to be too beautiful for anything but a chalice-veil.

Miss Amadrew! with that name another train of thought came into Ellice's mind. Did Robin really care for the tall, earnest-voiced young lady at Thorley Hall, who was always so full of zeal for the Church, and whom the Rector's wife pronounced "unorthodox," care for her as men care for the women they want to marry? The notion had never crossed Miss Devereux's mind before, and it rather staggered her; partly because she was not given to sentimental imaginings, or to letting her mind run on possible loves and lovers; and partly because she could not call to memory Robin ever having spoken of Miss Amadrew, except in the most casual manner. But it was not his way to speak much about other people—public characters excepted. Had he not objected to her doing the contrary with regard to Gordon? And it was very likely that he might love the young lady all the more deeply for his reticence with regard to her name. Ellice had already learnt that in nothing does a man so differ from a woman as from his extreme aversion to either talking, or hearing talked about, the lady of his affections; and yet it gave a new touch to the pain she had felt yesterday when the Squire spoke of her as a "stranger lass," now that she learnt something about Robin which Mrs. Herne and Margaret discussed, as long suspected by both; and at which she, whom he had singled out for his friend

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and companion ever since her arrival, had never so much as guessed.

"And perhaps it was *because* he liked me that Miss Amadrew has taken notice of me," Ellice thought. "If so, she must care for him too. But Mrs. Herne thinks her parents would never consent. Oh! poor Robin! No wonder the farm talk grates on him if he thinks Sir George would make that a bar to his marrying his daughter. He was very generous to let me go on scolding him yesterday, and to act so sweetly this morning. I don't think any one—no, not even Gordon—could have behaved better when provoked."

"Ellice," said Margaret, coming into the room at this juncture, and speaking more softly than her wont, though her face was flushed and had a vexed, uneasy expression, "it you aren't busy would you mind doing those preserves for me! Mother wants them covered at once, and I had something I wanted to do—it won't take me ten minutes—but if you are are busy"—

"Oh, no, of course not. I will come at once," said Ellice, throwing down her work on the instant; but even as she rose it flashed upon her consciousness that by going up to the storeroom she should miss—what? Seeing Robin, and making up her tiff with him? Well, and what if she did? Was a trifle of that sort to stand in the way of her making herself useful to Margaret, who so seldom condescended to ask assistance from any one? She felt ashamed of herself for having even entertained such a thought, and went briskly upstairs without so much as lingering to cast a glance out of the passage-window which looked over the rich and golden cornfields from which, it might be, Robin was then returning.

Yet she was conscious of her heart giving a great jump when suddenly, as she sat up in the dim, cool fruit room under the eaves, she heard the voice for which, all unknowingly, she had been listening for so long, speaking to Mrs. Herne on the floor below. What was said she could not hear; but something heavy

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was being carried downstairs; and her hand trembled as she cut out the round cover for a preserve-jar. Was it his portmanteau, and could he be going away, *then*, even before dinner? She let the mutilated circle drop on her knee and listened.

"Not till Saturday?" Mrs. Herne's voice said.

"Or Monday. Just as likely Monday if I like it," Robin answered. "Yes," in reply to something else inaudible. "I want a change; and anyhow I must go to Scarborough next week."

The voices went inside the room below and became undistinguishable; but presently they came out and floated up to Ellice again.

"And you think your father will consent?"

"He said so. I told him it was brutally unfair."

"You didn't say that, I hope!"

"Well, not in those words; but it is. Fancy separating two people who care for one another, for a mere absurd prejudice? *I'd* not stand it, I know, and so I told him."

"But are you sure *she* cares, dearie?"

"Quite sure; she told me so. Now, mother, you must'nt repeat it."

A murmured negative followed; and then a shutting of drawers, and going downstairs. Ellice had ceased to listen after the first words, and had gone on with her occupation; but she had not moved or shut the store-room door; for, until Robin's final caution, it never occurred to her that there could be any secret it what was said partly on a landing and partly in a room with open doors and audible to any passing servant. Now, of a sudden the meaning of it all came to her. He had been speaking to his father about Miss Amadrew, and the latter had some prejudice against the match. Perhaps Sir George's superciliousness, or the "Newman" sound of the name; and to herself she said:

"I hope he will not hold out. I hope he won't. Poor Robin! Dear Robin! he has chosen very well, and he deserves to have his choice."

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Fain would she have gone downstairs now; but natural delicacy withheld her. He might be still speaking to his mother on the same subject; and if it was to be a secret she would only be in the way. So she sat on, cutting out rounds of paper and tying them over preserve-pots with resolute perserverance till a gust of wind closed the door with a bang and made her solitude still greater.

Not a sound now reached her, except once a faint call, though on whom or what she could not hear; but shortly afterwards there was a sudden clatter of horses' hoofs on the pavement outside, and Robin's voice very gay and cheery, rising up through the window this time as he called out:

"Good-bye again then, mother, till you see me back," and then the heavy jar of the yard-gates and rattle of wheels.

Flinging down paper and scissors she sprang to her feet, unhooked the little latticed window in the roof, and thrusting her face against the ivy which almost shut out the light of day from outside, peered down upon the yard below with a sinking heart.

Yes, it was even as she thought! Robin was then in the act of driving out of the yard, without so much as a backward glance at the house he was leaving, without even the civility of a good-bye to herself whose warmest friend he had always appeared till then!

She was only a girl, and she had grown very much fonder of him than she thought: much fonder than she had ever grown of any of the other men with whom she had so often been thrown in the same, homely, everyday companionship in her South American country life. Her eyes filled with hot, salt tears of mortification, so big and blinding that, though she saw, she was hardly able to distinguish the tall figure of Margaret running towards the house with head so bent as almost to give her the appearance of cowering as she hurried along, keeping closely under the shadow of the

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hedge of the Long Meadow which lay at the bottom of the orchard.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Herne came into the attic and uttered an exclamation of surprise at finding Ellice just arranging the last of the many rows of jars upon a shelf.

"Deary me, Ellice child, you don't mean to say you've been here the whole morning an' done them all too! Where was my head not to think of you! and I called you too a while ago, you an' Margaret also, to bid Robin good-bye before he went."

"Did you, auntie? I did not hear. Oh! I am sorry," said Ellice frankly. Mrs. Herne patted her shoulder.

"Never mind, dearie; it didn't matter a bit, or I'd ha' sent him to look for you; but he was in a hurry, an' left good-byes for you an' Maggie. She was out too, and just missed him. An' now go down an' amuse yourself wi' her. You look quite tired sittin' up here i' the dark; an' as for her, I shouldn't ha thought gathering a small dish of' gooseberries could ha' made her so red an' heated. She looks quite done up."

CHAPTER XIII.

"ELLICE," said the Squire abruptly, "where is that cousin o' thine at present?"

They were all sitting at breakfast with the summer sunshining in through a network of green vine leaves and gay blushroses upon *them*; and the Squire's voice, deep, and *sounding* as it often did as if he were irritated or angry, made everybody start. Ellice looked up rather bewildered. She had been thinking of Lyle Devereux, the cousin she had never yet seen, at the moment, and her answer showed it. The Squire interrupted her more sharply than before.

"Come, come, ye knew well enow whom I mean;

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an' as ye keep up a pretty tight correspondence wi' un, ye must know well enow where he is too."

"Gordon!" exclaimed Ellice, wondering more than ever; for the Squire seldom spoke sharply to her, and the change from "thou" and "thee" was a sign that he was displeased. "Of course I do," she added quickly; "he is in London, he always lives there."

"I thought even Londoners turned out o' that stived up the city o' theirs in the dog-days," answered the Squire.

And Ellice answered sadly "that it was quite true; but Gordon had given up his own holiday-time to oblige a sick comrade, and now that he was free again the Devereuxs, to whom he had been going, could not have him."

"An' maybe he'd not care about coming here, even if we asked him," said the Squire; but the tone sounded more good-humoured, and Mrs. Herne smiled as if she had known what was coming all along; and Ellice, after an eager inquiring glance from one face to the other, almost choked, such a great lump of joy seemed to rise in her throat as she cried out:

"Oh, Squire! oh, auntie! do you *really* mean it—that he might?"

"Faith!" said the Squire, laughing, "'tis easy to see who stands near to this maid's heart. Hast really been fretting so much to see him then, child?"

And Mrs. Herne added almost reproachfully: "Why did thee never tell us, Ellie love?"

"Why, auntie, of course I want to see him," Ellice began, lifting her innocent blue eyes in some surprise at the rebuke. She was hesitating whether to go on to say that she had not liked to ask such a favor, when the Squire stopped her.

"Nay, nay, wife; remember what I bade thee, an' never force confidence. The lass is our guest, an' not our child; and so free to say or leave unsaid what she pleases. For my part, Maid Ellice, an' I say it freely, I'd as lief foregather wi' a toad as a Jesuit; an' to

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speak truth, I dunnot hold wi' papists or papistry of any sort, albeit son Robert pretends as they weren't unknown i' the days o' King Alfred. Howsoever, an' for that matter, there be always vermin in all times an' all parts; an' yet no man need like vermin the better for that. Likewise 'tis no fault o' yours, bein' foreign born, if the folk ye cleave to come o' a different stock to me an' mine; an' though I dunnot hold wi' crossin' o' breeds in general, least of all wi' inferior stock, still, as I've said, ye be neither chick nor child o' mine an' if your parents didn't say ye nay, 'tisn't my place so to do. Therefore, an' you'll say 'tis so, why so I'll take it; an' you may write an' bid him welcome here an' you will."

Now, although Ellice spoke English as well as many English girls, and understood it equally, I am bound to observe here that when the Squire launched out on one of his long speeches, delivered in the broadest dialect, and impeded by the fact that he continued to take in his breakfast at the same time, it became intelligible to his ward at the rate of about one word in ten; and on the present occasion she looked so puzzled that Mrs. Herne put in:

"Father only wants to be sure, love, that my brother, as your first guardian, an' knowing your poor mother's wishes, would approve," and on Ellice answering eagerly in the affirmative, she was made happy by being told to write and ask Gordon to run down and spend a few days with them at once. Robin, as Mrs. Herne casually remarked, was not coming home after all before he went to Scarborough, and so the visitor could have his room.

"'Tis the best time for his coming indeed," said the Squire, who, directly the question he had himself mooted was settled, had assumed the mournful air of a man injured by some cruel necessity, "for I mun be out i' the fields all day an' every day till the harvest's gotten in; and shanna be i' the way o' th' young man; but thee must tell him, Maid Ellice, not to try any

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proselytisin' on Maggie an' the serving-wenches. He can proselytise the fowls an' pigs an' he will, but nout else, nout else in house o' mine."

And Ellice only laughed in answer. She had not come to the age for laying any material weight on differences of creed, and was indeed divided at that moment between pleasure at seeing her favorite idol and sorrow that Robin would not be back to see him too. She was so fond of Robin; the house had not been like itself since he left; and what a pity that that horrid visit to Scarborough should take him away at this time of all others! They would have been sure to like one another, she thought within her innocent heart, not having the shadow of an idea that it was to avoid young Maxwell that Robin was staying away; and that through a manly, generous impulse had made him go to his father, and himself suggest and press upon him the duty of not separating the cousins any longer since he had found out how Ellice's heart yearned after the proscribed one, he had felt it so impossible to stay and witness the meeting between them without a betrayal of his own feelings that he resolved to stay away as long as ever he could, and try by change of scene and faces to get over his disappointment before being again brought in contact with the girl who had been the occasion of it.

The fact was that Robin had been gradually getting fonder and fonder of his father's ward without being aware of the extent of his own feelings, until they were revealed to him by the burst of wrath and jealousy with which he received the revelation of her own affection for Gordon Maxwell; and the blow fell all the heavier for its unexpectedness, and the suddenness with which it crushed all his own hopes in the very strength and vitality of their blowing. Accustomed to the reserve of English people in general, and forgetful of the wide difference made by Ellice's unusual training, he took it for granted that she would never have expressed her love for Gordon so frankly unless she

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were actually and formally engaged to him; and on that assumption he spoke to his parents. After all, I think there was a great deal of good in poor Robin, and that it showed as, if there *is* any in a man, it generally does, in his love for the girl who had won his heart only (as he felt in his first chagrin) to wound and wring it. It was a true love he felt for her; for even in the midst of that wrath and chagrin he felt almost inclined to admit the superiority of his unknown rival from the very fact of the latter being preferred before him by the young girl of whom, with all his conceit, he honestly believed himself to be utterly unworthy. She was so true, he said to himself, so frank in her speech, so noble in her ideas. Of course he had seemed a petty and contemptible thing in her eyes, and she had a right to tell him so; she who was so sweetly bearing an apparently indefinite separation from her lover, at the mere caprice of the father to whose wishes *he* paid so little atention. But things should not go on in that way; if she would not make *him* happy she could not prevent his making *her* so; and perhaps if some day she found out that she owed it to him she would own he was not as selfish as she had thought. It was not every man who would leave the field himself, in order to pave his rival's way to it; but, after all, she deserved to be happy, and it was something to have a hand in making her so.

Poor Robin! if Ellice had only guessed with what a heavy heart he rode away that day, she would have regretted his absence even more than she did now.

She had another cause for uneasiness, however, before evening, though of a more undefined kind, which drove the heir of the house out of her memory for the time being,

They were all sitting out on the lawn after tea, enjoying the coolness, and occupied in entertaining Miss Pelter, who had dropped in to pay them a visit, when the little old maid suddenly broke off in her prattling gossip with Mrs. Herne, and turning to Margaret, exclaimed:

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"But, by the way, my dear Miss Margaret, I've never asked you—I hope you were not much frightened by that horrid man the other day."

Everybody stared and looked at Margaret, for no one had heard anything of her being frightened at all; and the Squire burst out:

"*Man!* what man! Domn his bones for him! an' how is't that I've been told ne'er a word of it till this?"

"Because I never heard of it myself," said Margaret shortly and roughly. Her face had grown crimson, and she held her head very high, with an angry sort of flash in her eyes. "Some one must have been making game of Miss Pelter."

"Oh no, indeed, my dear," said the good lady, rather put out by the contempt in Margaret's tone. "No one would be so impertinent, I assure you. I mayn't be a very grand person in the parish—I don't say I am, though my dear papa's second wife was a niece of Sir Peyton Gosling, of Gosling Hall; and I've been there once myself, and everything in the best style—footmen in livery, and with" (dropping her voice modestly) "*with calves!* which, though one ought not to mention such things before gentlemen, are not seen every day in these times; but as I was going to say, it was our good friend Mrs. Mills herself saw the man following you; and very anxious, she told me, she was because of not being able to get to you."

"Mrs. Mills has been dreaming," said Margaret boldly, "for no one has followed me, and I have not been within sight of her or her house, for a month."

"No, my dear, no; just so; but it was she was in sight of you," persisted Miss Pelter, while the Squire looked on, growing gradually purple with wrath, which was only being pent in till he knew on whom to expend it. "And is was about five o'clock on Monday. She was feeling a little stronger that day (you know how ill she has been, dear Mrs. Herne), and had gone out for a turn in the pony-chaise with little Billy Larkins to

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drive; and coming down East Hill, between Gossett's land and the common, she saw you in the lane at the bottom of Gossett's, and a strange man alongside of you. At first she thought it might be a new acquaintance —he, he, he! one of Mr. Robert's college friends, you know; but when she asked Billy if he knew if any one was staying at the Croft, he up and said no, and that that person wasn't a gentleman at all, but just a fellow who'd been loafing about the place for a fortnight or more (you'll excuse my quoting Billy's unpolished mode of speech, ahem!), and he said he was sure the man was following Miss Margaret; for it was a way he had with all the girls about; and he had nearly got thrashed by Giles Jannin for making love to his wife under pretence of wanting to paint her. Indeed Mrs. Mills got quite alarmed about you; for she saw you speaking to him as if you were trying to send him away; and she wished she could have gone to you; but it's a long round for the carriage, and she couldn't send Billy across the fields on account of not being strong enough to hold the pony in case it *should* try to run away or kick, or do anything dreadful; so she made the boy stand up on the seat to look after you, and he said you were just turning into the lane at the bottom of your own orchard; so then she knew you were sure to be safe. I only hope you weren't frightened; though indeed we all know what courage you have, going about everywhere alone as you do."

"My courage was not called in question that day, at all events," said Margaret, checking the Squire just as his self-control was giving out, and facing round on her interrogator with the look of an animal at bay, her mouth set like a little *rock*, her body drawn rather back with her head put forward, and the light in her eyes *harder* and more glittering than usual. "Mrs. Mill's sight must be going, for, whoever else she saw, it was not me. I was not even out at the time she speaks of, but sitting quietly here in the arbor, as Ellice can tell

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you. We went in to tea together afterwards, don't you remember, Ellice?"

And then Margaret looked at Ellice. If ever the latter girl read an entreaty in any pair of eyes she read it at that moment, and the consciousness that it was so made her so uncomfortable that she hardly knew how to answer. To her great relief Mrs. Herne gave her no time to do so.

"Aye, now I mind the two lasses coming in together from the garden; for Robin had gone out to tea, an' they were a bit late' an' the master was put out. Mrs. Mill's must ha' mistook the girl; but dear heart! Miss Pelter, you gave quite a turn for the minute; for though I know there be plenty o' tramps about at harvest time, I didn't go to think they'd have the brass to trouble *our* girls; and Margaret, she's al'ays fond o' rambling about alone like."

"Then she'd better break her o' her fondness an' that straight off," cried the Squire, glaring at the whole party till Miss Pelter shook in her black stuff shoes, "for I'll not have it. Dost hear, Madge? I'll not have thee go tramping off by thyself when there's Robin, and Maid Ellice to company thee. 'Tis all very well that thou wast safe at home *this* time; but it might ha' been otherwise, it might ha' been otherwise; an' don't thee stir out walking alone again, wi'out it be to the village. Why, I've seen this very chap myself; a vulgar, half-bred fellow, dressed like a mountebank, an' wi' cheek enough for the devil."

"La! Squire," cried Miss Pelter, bridling all over, "you don't ought to speak of the powers of darkness as freely as that. Remember what dear Mr. Calthorpe tells us, that he is always walking round the earth seeking whom he may devour?"

"Then let un walk, ma'am; let un walk, roared the Squire so loudly that Ellice saw the faded green bow on the top of the spinster's hat gave quite a little jump. "A fine thing if London riff-raff be to come down here poking impudence at our wives an' wenches! Giles

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Jannin told me about him; for t'other day the men were eating their victuals under the hedge and he comes to me and says:

"'Master, I aren't brought ma dinner wi I. May I run home an' get'n wi' ma wife?'

"'Why, I didn't know ye had a wife, Giles,' says I.

"'Noa, master,' says he; 'but I were spliced to she afore sarvice time yesterday, I were; an' she's but a yoong wench, an' a bit lonesome,' says he, 'for she cooms from furrin parts down to Biggins-yallow, 'liven moile from here; an' aren't niver been i' this part afoor.'

"Sure enough I let him go; though I bid him be back sharp to time, for my corn had to be gotten in, wives or no wives; an' later on i' the day when I saw him I said:

"'Well, Giles, how didst find thy bride?'

"Wull, master,' says he, 'I foond 'er, an' I were back to toime; but I didn't half like un, an' I've had to bring the door-key along o' I into the bargain. What d'ye think I foond i' the houseplace when I got there, master?'

"'What's at the bottom of all evil, Giles,' said I, 'a woman!'

"And you'd ought to have been ashamed to say it, father," put in his Mrs. Herne. "Where would *you* be wi'out your own womenfolk?"

"Where I be, Maggy, where I be," retorted the Squire; "an' wi' a sight more money in my purse; but let me go on. 'Noa, master,' says Giles, 'not an 'ooman, leastways by 'erself, but a young man, dang him! a zittin' on th' end o' ma own table, starin' i' ma wife's face as free as iver you please; an' a talkin' as if he'd known she iver since 'er weanin'; tellin' 'er as 'er were that loovely i' the face he mun be 'lowed to zit awhile an' dror 'er. . . . . Loovely; Dang un! I coom in quiet like ahind un, an' zays I "Mister, I'll tell thee soomthing else that's loovely aside my wife's face," says, "and that's the knob of thick big stick o'

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mine," zays I; "and if thee dawn't take thy dammed impudent mug out o' this hoosh afore another minute," zays I, "thee 'll no be minded to *zit* down anywhere for a week to come; thee 'll that sore i' the bones an' buttock o' thee," says I.'

"An' well said for Giles, too, as I told him," added the Squire. "It seem the fellow is a play-actor or painter or summat o' that breed and just hangin' round these parts; and Giles found out he'd a lodging over at Mitching on the other side o' St Anne's Hill."

With which, and a few more threats directed against any individual of the sort who dared to address or annoy any of *his* family, the Squire finished, having however directed the subject from Margaret's nominal adventure; and the conversation being turned into other channels, soon flowed on in the usual stream of village gossip.

The uncomfortable feeling, however, remained in Ellice's mind. It never would have arisen but for that in Margaret's eyes; but once there it would not go away, and set her thinking of the evening referred to, the day before Robin went away, the day—yes! when she cried herself to sleep under the apple-tree, and had been woke up by man's voice arguing something with Margaret. . . . No, that had been a dream, for Margaret said she was at home all the time; and yet how strange that the dream-voices should have seemed to come from the very lane in which Mrs. Mills had seen the supposed Margaret and her attendant! She was not suspicious. Very candid-minded people seldom are, and she had been brought up into so clear and liberal an atmosphere to contemplate the possibility of manœuvring or intrigue in any companion of hers, or girl of her own class; but she had a vague, uncomfortable feeling, and a trifling incident that occurred later on did not help her to dissipate it.

The two girls walked back to the village with Miss Pelter when she left. Margaret had slipped away from the party some few minutes beforehand; and after

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leaving the old maid at her own door, she said abruptly that she had a letter to post, and walked on with Ellice to the post-office. In drawing the envelope from her pocket, however, either her hand shook or she was clumsy, and it fell to the ground. Ellice picked it up and saw (she could not help it, as Margaret's handwriting was unusually large) that it was addressed to "——Gerrant, Esq., 9, High Street, Mitching." It was only a few minutes back that she had heard the name of that village for the first time, or else it might not have struck her. As it was she said innocently:

"Mitching! Isn't that the place where Giles said that horrid man lives? I never heard of it before."

"And what if you did not?" said Margaret, almost snatching the letter from her, while her dark face glowed with a sudden anger which took her friend completely by surprise. "What do you mean? May I not have friends without your hearing of them? I tell you what it is, Ellice, I will not be spied upon or interfered with by anybody, least of all by you."

"But I do not wish to interfere with you," said Ellice. with some dignity, though her face showed her astonishment. "Why should I? I do not even understand you, Margaret."

And Margaret, rather ashamed of her violence, muttered something like an apology. She was even rather affectionate to Ellice for the rest of the evening, and talked about Gordon's coming with a cordiality which she had not hitherto shown, and for which Ellice felt grateful to her.

Margaret was always odd, and, after all, why should she not have friends in heaps of places that Ellice had never heard of?

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CHAPTER XIV.

"AND you are sure she will say nothing," said Gerrant anxiously.

It was not the first time, by very many, since the day when they sought shelter in the doorway of the old ruin, that he was keeping an appointment with Margaret Herne; but it was the first time that the appointment had been made for after dark, and it was of her making—a circumstance which rendered both somewhat nervous and embarrassed.

"She has not done so yet, so I don't suppose she will," Margaret said, "unless when her cousin comes. He's a Jesuit, you know, so, if he tells him, we are not safe an hour. I never thought of that till this morning, and I've felt quite queer and sick ever since."

"That is because you are not as wise as you are good-looking," said Nino, without much respect. "A Jesuit! What *is* a Jesuit! You say it exactly in the tone of a last century romance writer. Do you mean a Roman Catholic priest? If so, it *is* unlucky, for they're a deuced deal too fond always of poking their noses into other people's affairs, though I've met one or two abroad who were jolly fellows enough."

"No, I don't think—I know he is not a *priest*," said Margaret, a little abashed under the sense of ignorance rudely thrust upon her. "I have heard Ellice speak of him as a civil engineer; but she is very fond of talking about how frightfully good he is, and I believe she tells him everything."

"A civil engineer! Then how the deuce could he be a Jesuit?" said Nino, more rudely than before. Then, as another thought occured to him: "You call him *her* cousin! I thought he was yours too?"

"So he is, my first cousin too; but I have never seen him."

"And she knows him well, is in love with him, in fact?"

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"She is in love with him, certainly," said Margaret, laughing a little; "but as to knowing him—she has not seen him for nearly six years, since he was sent home to school."

'Not since she was a mere child, then?"

"And he too. Yes."

"And you talk of their being in love! My dear girl, if they are, the passion must be more purely platonic than I, for one, am able to imagine. Make love to him yourself, *belle Marguerite.* He can never withstand those eyes of yours; and then you will have him on your side from the first, and deaf to anything she can say."

"Make love to him? *I?* Is that what you advise me?" said Margaret, in a low tone, conveying much secret resentment. Gerrant looked at her, took one of her hands and kissed it, laughing lightly.

"Yes, for, having advised it, I should know it to be a still more platonic sham than the other; and, besides, *I* should not be there to look on at it. I don't think, you know, I could stand doing that, even if I knew it to be a sham; but I can't realise your caring for—for an ordinary sort of man."

Margaret raised her eyes to his, a strange look, half fierce, half wistful, struggling in them.

"Is it anything to you whom I care for?" she said harshly; but haughty as the words were in themselves, there was something under the tone so widely different that Gerrant, albeit somewhat testy at having been summoned to stand in damp grass in a corner of a field at ten o'clock at night, was moved thereby to lift her hand again to his lips, and keep it there while he answered in a tone whose softness was even more effective with his auditor than he imagined:

"Is it *not*, Margaret?"

Her retort followed as quickly as the crack of a pistol-bullet on the flash.

"If it is, then, I care for *you.* There!" and drawing back her hand she clasped it in its fellow behind her

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back, confronting him with dazzling undaunted eyes. "I don't care who knows it either, if you don't; and I would not make love to any other man, even as a sham, and at your bidding, if he were an angel incarnate."

"My dear girl!" said Gerrant nervously, and then stopped. He was perfectly aware of the fact, had known it before she did, and taken no small gratification from the knowledge, both as bearing witness to his powers of fascination over the weaker sex, and because the strangeness and beauty and wild, untamed nature of this girl had exercised a singular fascination over himself, and disposed him to a certain tenderness for her. She both excited and tantalised him, and he liked to have her with him, and to draw her out, and study her, and paint her in each one of her ever-varying moods; liked it so well that, at any risk to her, he was determined to gratify himself in it. There was no real danger. He was only there for a little while. Other women had fallen in love with his handsome face scores of times before now, and got cured. It would be the same with her. Probably before another year she would be married to some Downshire clod, with a red face and twopenn'orth of fat brain exclusively concentrated on draining and manure; and, meanwhile, it was very pleasant, and gave an unlooked for piquancy to his country quarters.

So Gerrant had reasoned with himself while he merely guessed at Margaret's feelings by the light and shades of her dark face and the otherwise groundless caprices of her strange disposition: and so reasoning, he complacently warmed himself at the fire which he had kindled, and which he flattered himself he could keep sufficiently in check not to run the risk of being scorched by it. When, however, he received her hastily-written note, saying that she *must* see him, that she could not go out, and that the only time at which she could meet him would be between ten and half-past at night, at the bottom of the field where they had already held one hasty assignation on the morning of Robin's

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departure, he felt instinctively that some combustible had been cast into the fire, and might cause a general conflagration if he did not get at it in time.

Now!——

It had been raining that evening, and the moon was hidden by armies of great black clouds, ragged and broken at the edges, and drifting rapidly over a misty, watery sky, greyly visible in patches between their torn and threatening edges. Beneath this sky, house and trees, and hedges showed black and indistinct as one of Whistler's wierdest "landscape nocturnes." Only the long grass about their feet threw back a pale refracted whiteness from the moisture still hanging heavily on every succulent blade; and in the centre of it stood Margaret, her tall figure upright and revealed against one of those paler blots in the sky, her face thrown backwards white and quivering with an intensity of passion, and intensity of yearning like to nothing he had ever seen in any woman's face before, her whole form dilated and palpitating with the force of emotions which had suddenly come to a head and found an outlet through the parted, trembling lips, the dank masses of her hair falling round her like sable ropes and bound into the lines of her body by the nervous tension of her two arms clasped behind her—a picture more powerful in its passionate silence than any yet painted by the hand of man, and speaking to every nerve and sense of the artist's impressionable nature like the sudden, opening crash of some divine organ, startling and almost stunning him with the revelation of its power.

The *fright* spoke first as the coward soul felt the shock of a courage greater than its own, and breaking through all his flimsy webs in that fierce avowal; but the man and the painter were yet stronger within him. He could not stand and see the flame die out of her face, "blotted like breath from a glass" by his hesitating remonstrance. Involuntarily, he put out his arms and drew her to him, murmuring as his lips touched hers:

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"Do you really? *My* Margaret, my queen!" And then, for a moment, they both stood there, forgetful of the world and all in or about it, but the mad beating of their own excited hearts. And the breeze sighed like whispering voices in the hedgerow at their back, and the rain which had begun again pattered mournfully on their two heads, and ran in shining drops off Gerrant's shoulders on to Margaret's breast.

A very slight physical discomfort is often a more effective stimulant in bringing persons to their senses than any moral or intellectual promptings. Gerrant, whose constitution was exceptionally alive to the former influence, shivered and looked up, loosening his arms involuntarily.

"Raining again, by Jove!" he said; "Margaret, you must go in. You will catch your death of cold. Good Heavens!" and he laid his hand on her shoulder; "you are quite wet already."

"Am I? I don't care," she said dreamily, her immense eyes still fixed on his as though held there by some invisible agency.

"But I do," he answered with some impatience. "Do you want every one to guess that you have been out? Go back quickly, and for goodness' sake be careful. What would you do if any one were to find out?"

"*Tell them*," she retorted, the changed tone of his voice chilling her more than any rain into the outward semblance at any rate of her normal state of sullen doggedness. "I am not afraid—if you are not?"

"And I am!" replied Gerrant with a burst of most heartily-spoken candor; "*for you*," he added, however in the same breath. "You don't know the world as I do, my Gipsy Queen, or you wouldn't talk so."

"I shall know it when I have seen it," she said. "I never have yet. *You* are all the world I know."

It was raining faster now, and the quick, pattering drops acted as a check on any enthusiasm which might have been rekindled by the pathetic daring of the girl's

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words. Gerrant only took her hands and squeezed them in his as he said:

"Hush! you are too perfect to be let go; but I mustin't be so selfish as to keep you longer. Run back quickly now. I shall see you again soon."

"But where? You know father has forbidden me to go out by myself any more except to the village; and Ellice suspects already."

"Do nothing to rouse her suspicions—confound them!—then; and don't delay now. I will write to-morrow and tell you."

"But not to the house! I never get letters from any one but my brother, and they would notice."

"To the post office then. You can always get them there. Good-night, my Margaret and be careful, as you love me."

"I will," she said, as solemnly as though those words were an argument which needed no strengthening; and so they parted, he stepping through a gap in the hedge to the lane where he had left his horse tied to a fence, while she walked slowly and dreamily homewards, and, creeping quietly across the deserted rick-yard, with a whisper to the old watch dog who knew her step too well to offer further remonstrance than lifted ears and a keener gleam in the wakeful alertness of his brown eyes, got into the house by the open scullery window, through which she had made her exit; and closing it softly behind her glided up to her own room so noiselessly that Ellice, who was awake, and heard the gentle creak of the staircase under her upcoming footsteps, thought it was but the cat, Margaret's one pet, and was not surprised to hear the latter cross her room a moment later and turn the handle of the door.

"I wonder if she would get up from her sleep to let any one but pussy in," was all the thought that crossed Ellice's mind, too innocent as yet to harbor suspicion of evil without the latter were in point of fact forced upon her; and meanwhile Margaret had thrown herself upon

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the floor near her window trembling in every limb and pulse of her whole body, not from fear of detection but from the excitement of the past interview, the very intensity of which had driven all fear away.

But for Gerrant's command indeed, I doubt if she would have condescended to skulk under the shadow of ricks and farm buildings, or soften the fall of her feet in passing through the silent and sleepful house. To be loved by Gerrant, as in the supremacy of her folly she fancied she was loved, was a matter for pride and joy, instead of shame, with the girl whose hitherto inert nature he had stirred into life.

"*You* are all the world I know," she had said to him; and she spoke the truth when she said it. She had *made* him her world, and she could see nothing else but himself in it. She wanted nothing else, neither change, or excitement, nor town life, nor new people, nor any of the things which for years she had silently yearned for, till her discontent had grown into a morbid craving so intense as to deaden her senses to everything bright and pleasant around her, and she became, as it were, a veritable corpse mouldering in the self-dug grave of its own gloom until the hand of a man touched the clay and the voice of a man said to her. "Margaret, come forth!" and straightway her heart leapt up, as though pierced by a galvanic shock, and she awoke.

She awoke *to him!* to him and to her love for him: nothing else as yet! That he loved her also, that he would marry her, and take her away from this green prison of her birth place to his own home in London and the new sights and scenes of which he had so often spoken, to her, telling her, what she felt already, that she was born to enjoy them, not to moulder away in the stagnation of this ancient farmhouse, were one and all merely the component parts forming the natural sequence of that love. She never even thought of doubting his love, or of being surprised at it. The intensity of her own passion glowed with too white a heat not

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to make all connected with it appear of the same color, even without the honeyed words and outspoken admiration which, while waking the flame in her own heart, appeared—God pity her ignorance!—to be but the expression of the affection which had found its answer in herself.

Her thin muslin dress was wet through. Her feet were wet too; yet she made no effort to change the one or dry the others. She was not conscious of them as she sat upon the floor making a damp circle with her clothes upon the snow white boards. Once or twice she lifted her right hand, the one he had kissed, and pressed it against her heart; or stroked it in a sort of wondering tenderness with the other. Once or twice she touched her burning lips; and each time a smile, *like* none ever seen on Margaret's face before, passed over them. Once she said his name out loud and stretching out her arms as though appealing to him, and in all this no thought of her father or mother, of the home of her childhood, or the one brother she possessed, ever crossed her mind.

He had come to take her away from them, and that was enough. In her present excited state it almost seemed to her as though her whole life had been but awaiting for the one fact of his appearance, a growing up to it, a state of abeyance like that of the souls in limbo—necessary, but not even to be remembered now that it was passed.

How was it possible indeed for her to remember her homely title of "Our Madge," now that she had once heard herself called, "My Margaret, my queen!"

Gerrant meanwhile had got upon his horse and ridden homewards in a very different mood: a mood compounded of a certain amount of elevation with a large proportion of annoyance and embarrassment. The annoyance certainly predominated; and more than once he muttered:

"What did she mean by being such an idiot, hang her!" in a tone which, could Margaret have heard it,

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would have fallen like a bar of ice upon her throbbing heart.

"The next thing will be that I shall find myself in a regular mess; and all through her folly, when I might have got all I wanted without any bother at all if I had known who she was from the beginning."

To speak the truth, it was primarily Margaret's fault that the first sitting had been repeated, and originated simply in her description of her father as a "farmer." Of course Gerrant soon found out, not only Squire Herne's real position, but the proud and irritable disposition of the old gentleman; but in the meantime the mischief was done: for while looking on his eccentric model merely as the daughter of some neighborhood yokel he had no scruple in making appointments with her and treating her with a freedom which he would not have dared had he known her parentage and station.

She was wonderfully handsome, utterly ignorant of the world, and, though "lots above her class," as he in his ignorance expressed it, was quite ready to throw herself at his feet, or fall into any of his suggestions; and as he saw no harm in either winning the affections or compromising the good name of a girl of the people, he was quick to seize on the fact that she had kept their first interview as secret and to insist on the necessity of the future ones being equally so: a necessity purely selfish in the first instance: more binding on her than on himself in the latter ones.

To have this black-eyed and stormy-browed maiden at his beck and call, to fool and flirt with, was very pleasant; but suppose that the rough grazier who might call her daughter were capable of taking such a coarse view of the amusement as to suggest the alternative of marriage with his penniless and unmanageable daughter *vice* the "loovely thick stick" Giles Jannin had already introduced to his notice! These country louts were so very coarse in their way of look-

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ing at things; and Gerrant objected about equally to matrimony or thrashing.

But to entangle a gentleman's daughter in a *liason*, to engage her affections and involve her in imprudences with no end or intention but his own gratification, was, as he knew, a very different matter; and one which, if found out, might result in making the neighborhood (a decidedly good and unhackneyed one for artistic purposes) too disagreeably hot to hold him. The discovery of Margaret's standing was indeed a most unpleasant shock to him; for when it occurred he had not only gone too far on his previous tack to permit of his making her acquaintance in more formal style; but had unfortunately met and exchanged an angry word or two with the Squire himself on the subject of tresspass.

"If I had only known it from the beginning," he said to himself irritably, "of course I should have managed differently, should have made the old man's acquaintance cap in hand, and by admiring his confounded old barn of a house got invited inside, and probably become as intimate with *la belle Marguerite*, and painted her portrait in a dozen different styles, with twice the ease and half the risk of the present state of things. What the devil made her play the rustic with me! And yet then I used to laugh at her duchess airs, and wonder where she got them from, and think she might do worse—d——it all!—than take to the model trade for her bread-winning. I suppose it's more flattering to me as it is; but it isn't fair on a man and its deucedly inconvenient, and like living on the edge of a volcano. What am I to do now, I wonder? It would be an awful loss to me not to have one more sitting for that picture, and yet—I believe the wisest plan would be to make a bolt of it. I was a fool to get her to come to the studio, but what *can* you do when a girl like that throws herself at your head, and now its harder than ever.

And Gerrant kicked his heels into the horse's sides,

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and rode on under the blue starlight and over the blackened moorland with a brow as furrowed as his plans. He was painting Margaret now as she appeared to him flying across the heath for shelter on the day of the storm: a picture which, under the title of "A woman of Glencoe," would he fancied be grand enough to pave the way to an A.R.A.-ship; and which an interruption to the sittings in its present stage would entirely spoil. He was certainly not at all disposed to accept *that* alternative; and yet, after to-night would he be safe in continuing the intimacy with a girl so utterly ignorant of the world and regardless of feminine *convenances* as the one whom he had so lately held in his arms at the bottom of her father's field?

"If I had only not been such a confounded idiot as to suggest her coming to the studio," he muttered to himself with angry impatience. "I shouldn't wonder if some one had seen her after all."

And he was right. His present studio, an unused coach-house at the bottom of his landlady's garden, was screened off from the house by a row of young fruit trees, and had a separate entrance of its own, by aid of which, he had hoped that the coming and going of any particular model might not be specially noted; and though it was half in joke that he had first pleaded with her that one half hour of her there would be more use to him than a dozen hasty out-of-door sittings, her evident desire to acquiesce had made him more eager in combating her objections, and more warm in his gratitude when she suddenly turned round and consented.

But the visit had not passed unseen. There are few things that do in a country village!

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CHAPTER XV.

"A BAD feverish cold and a good deal of inflammation, nothing worse," said the doctor; "but keep her in bed for a couple of days, Mrs. Herne, and see that she takes the remedies I have ordered. It's just as well you sent for me at once; for I can tell you it might have been serious if not taken in time."

It was the day of Gordon Maxwell's arrival, and there was no little stir and upset at the Croft; but, though the advent of a visitor from London was sufficient of itself to produce that in the quiet household, the fact that Margaret, was ill in bed, Margaret whose strength of limb and constitution were by-words in her home, was a still greater cause for excitement and even extended itself to the Squire, who had steadily ignored the previous one.

The girl had striven to get up as usual in the morning, and despite a burning head and aching limbs, to drag herself into her clothes; but a groan of irrepressible pain betrayed her. Mrs. Herne was passing her door at the moment; and once an anxious mother was inside, further effort at concealing the terrible cold she had caught on the previous night was impossible; and Margaret had to submit to be bundled back into bed and wrapped up in blankets while the doctor was sent for. As Mrs. Herne in her innocence observed, it was a wonder the girl hadn't caught her death, sleeping with her window open in all that pouring rain. Why, it must have been coming in all night, for there was quite a damp patch on the floor, and as to her dress and petticoat, which had been left on a chair near the window, they were as wet as though they had been dragged through a pond. And Margaret offered no denial or explanation, but only muttered that she was quite well, and could get up at once if she might: a statement her uncontrollable shivering and oppressed

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breathing contradicted too absolutely for argument.

To tell the truth, the girl was feeling half maddened by the annoyance of being suddenly confined to her room at the very moment when she most wanted the use of all the wits and freedom she had; and she took it out in snubbing Ellice to a perfectly savage extent every time the latter came in to wait on and attend to her.

And Ellice would so much rather have been altering the folds of the curtains in Gordon's room, or giving for the fiftieth time a finishing touch to the flowers in his vases; or even wandering down to the gate to watch for the first sign of his arrival, if duty and kindness had not led her instead to the bedside of the captious and difficult invalid.

"I wish you would keep away; I can't bear to see you going about smiling as if you were delighted to see me laid up here," the latter burst out in one of her fits of irritation.

Ellice turned quickly to her, equally shocked and distressed.

"Oh! Margaret, you know it is not that. How could you think any one so unfeeling! If I was smiling it was only because I can't help being happy at the thought that Gordon is coming to-day, and that I shall see him."

"Well, I must say you don't try to hide your affection for him!" said Margaret, the more bitterly for her secret resentment at having to hide her own passion for Gerrant: she who would have been proud to own it to the whole world if he had let her. Ellice looked at her in very genuine surprise.

"Why should I hide it, Margaret? I think that you, like Robin, hardly understand how near he stands to me, or how——"

"Oh dear, yes; we understand now well enough," Margaret interrupted impatiently. "Wasn't that why Robin asked father to let you have him here? though as you had never told us——but don't talk about him

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now. Go away, please; my head aches, and I hate having people about me. Do go."

And so ordered, Ellice had no resource but to obey; carrying with her as she went a grateful feeling to Robin for having been, as she now learnt, the cause of her happiness. And yet even now it never occurred to her that it was of *that* that he had been speaking to his mother on the day of his departure; or that it was the cruelty of separating her from Gordon, not himself from Miss Amadrew, which had been the subject of discussion between him and his father.

He had been good and generous even while quarrelling with her and sneering at her hero, and she liked him better for it than she had ever done before; liked him so well that in the midst of her own happiness, that intense happiness of expectation which seldom, if ever, finds its equal in fruition, she felt sorry that he was not there that she might thank him and tell him, as he must like to be told how great a pleasure he had given her.

For the pleasure was too great to prevent its shining being apparent even to Margaret's self-absorbed intelligence in the utter gladness which beamed out unconsciously in the girl's very voice and step. She was bright enough usually; so bright a little woman indeed that you never thought of her wanting or missing anything beyond her present surroundings; but behind the inborn readiness of adaptability which fused itself so entirely in the life about her that some were almost inclined to suspect her of frivolity and want of caring for that left behind, there lay depths of patient regret and silent, ceaseless yearnings which none of her present friends had never dreamt of *grazing;* and now that one at least of all that she had lost was going to be given back to her, it seemed in her first rejoicing as if she were regaining all; and as if mother, father, and home itself were centred in the cousin, who, unseen for so many years, had been the idol of her life.

He came at last! It had seemed a long morning to

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Ellice, and she would fain have worked off some of the tireless activity of expectation by going to the station to meet him; but no one suggested it; and Margaret being ill, it seemed selfish to take herself out of the way; so she waited patiently within doors; and was indeed just helping Mrs. Herne to *indue* one of her smartest caps in honor of the stranger nephew's arrival, when the sharp rattle of wheels was heard upon the gravel without, and she had barely time for a breathless:

Oh! auntie, there he is," before she was off and flying downstairs to meet him in the hall. What did she see there?

A very tall man, a man not slight and graceful like the boy she remembered, with golden curls and a fair sensitive face, but big and broad-shouldered, with a plain, somewhat stern face, and a huge hand in the act of removing the hat from a sandy head of close-cropped hair; a man so unlike anything she knew or had expected, that she almost stood still in bewilderment if it was indeed her Gordon and not some stranger; but her light footsteps had been heard, and he turned round flashing on her a pair of clear, keen blue eyes, with a look in them which seemed in one moment to recall, not only himself, but everything she had left behind in her South American home, and brought her in one glad, breathless rush to his side, panting out:

"Gordon! Oh! Gordon, you have come to me at last."

She held up her face and opened her arms to him; but he must have been equally taken by surprise with herself for he made no motion to take her in his own, but steppcd back a little, holding out his hand and saying in a more than doubtful tone:

"*Is* it Ellice? I did not know you."

"Who else do you think?" she answered, half laughing in her agitation, but the laugh was a very shaky one, and unconsciously she was steadying herself by

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the grasp of the hand which still held hers. He looked down into her face.

"Yes; I see now it is you; but—I had quite forgotten you would be a woman," and there was such a *naive* tone of disappointment in his voice, that though Ellice smiled there were tears in her eyes as she answered, trying to speak lightly:

"Not a very big one even now Gordon " with a little innocent pain betraying itself in her eyes. "Aren't you going to kiss me?"

"Kiss you? Yes, certainly." And he stooped quickly and did it, a kind brotherly kiss on her forehead; but the color had rushed into his face as though the action would not have occurred unsuggested to himself and somehow the touch of his lips must have told Ellice as much. She felt shy with him all of a moment, and moved away at once, letting go his hand under pretence of leading the way into the sitting-room, with a new sensation of strangeness which it had never occurred to her as being even possible to connect with her Gordon.

Ay de mi! who has not known the mingled pain and pleasure of one of these reuñions after a parting of many years: pleasure so exquisite in anticipation, yet so woven with pain in realisation that during that first hour or so our hearts seem as it were torn in twain between the agony of happiness we felt so short a while ago, and the agony of happiness we feel ought to be in us now and which we cannot find! We *have* the long-lost one. He is by our side, speaking to us, looking in our face as in dreams we have so often fancied him, and wakened yearning that the dream were true; and yet it seems as if we had him not, as if this actual presence were more a dream than all those bygone visions, and the yearning had swept back upon our own hearts never to be satisfied any more. We wanted that which we lost, and this is something different. The voice that speaks to us may be a pleasanter one; but it is not his. The face that meets ours may be hand-

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somer; but it is the face of a stranger. Years have passed, and we have treasured up every look and tone and gesture of the past, that when we meet again there may be no strangeness, nothing which we had forgotten to relearn. No lost links between the old life taken from us for a while and now restored in all its fulness and integrity; but everything as it was before, only rendered dearer and more precious by the length of our separation from it. We have done this, and behold it is all for nought: the very keenness of our remembrance of what was, only seems to point more clearly the strangeness and difference of what *is;* the completeness of our identity with the past seems but to sever us more entirely from the present. The body of our hope has been given to us: but it is a dead body, for the soul which animated it before, the soul of the old life and the old love, has gone, "blotted like breath from a glass," in that first moment when we stand gazing with brimming eyes into the face which is *not* the face which we have loved to picture and and craved to see for many and many a by-gone day. He has come back to us. He is here; and even as we say the words we *feel with a quiver of loss* piercing to the very marrow of our hearts that in very truth it is not so, but that in that moment he has been taken away; not for a time as before, but for always; and that the moment of our gain is in actual fact that of a cruel and irredeemable loss.

Something of this—which we have all felt at times and grow used to expecting, knowing, as experience the consoler teaches us, that it does not last, and that the more readily we shut our eyes to the ideal and accept the reality, the more easily the one will fuse with the other till the old seems to blend with the new and the past to be given back to us with the present—Ellice was feeling now. She had so often fancied this meeting and all the incidents connected with it. She had so often thought of all she wanted to say to Gordon, and all he would want to say to her, that now

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that he was come, or rather, that this strange man had come in his place, it seemed impossible that anything should be as she had imagined, and worse than difficult to say anything at all; and Gordon too felt the strangeness, though in a lesser degree; or rather the over-keen sensibilities of the girl reacted on the calmer nature of the man, and produced in part the very constraint and formality which pained her. It was a relief to both, though neither would have avowed it, when Mrs. Herne came into the room, gorgeous in her new cap, beaming with smiles and voluble in the heartiness of her welcome to the nephew she had never before seen. What he was in himself, or what he was like, mattered little to her, good soul. Her greeting would have been as cordial if he had been a blackamoor or a dwarf; and Ellice found herself, rather to her bewilderment, beginning to feel more easy and familiar with the Gordon who had always seemed like her own especial property, and no one else's, as she stood by while Mrs. Herne reached up on tip-toe to kiss and pat the big, awkward-limbed fellow, made him stand up at his full height that she might see how tall he was, and sit down that she might push back his sandy hair to look for "brother Harry's" brow, pinched his sallow, clean-shaven cheeks, told him that he was a good boy not to have grown a nasty beard, and that he wasn't near as good-looking as his father or mother, "though I doubt Ellie will want to quarrel wi' me for saying so," she added with a smile at the young girl, which provoked a wistful look from the latter into her cousin's serious eyes, and the whimsically candid answer:

"He is so altered from what he was, auntie. He used to be just like his mother, and she was lovely at least I always thought her so."

"Every one alters in six years," said Gordon, coloring as was natural at these remarks on his personal appearance. "I should not care to be a lovely man now if I could; but I have been thinking of Lisa all this while as a small child in short petticoats; and now she looks

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less natural than you do, Aunt Maggie. *You* are very like my father."

And from the way in which he looked at her, and in which Mrs. Herne immediately kissed him again, Ellice knew that those two were friends at once; and felt unaffectedly sorry when the old lady declared she wasn't going to stay any longer; "she knew they'd do a deal better wit'out her, wi' all they must have to talk about," and so trotted away again, disregarding all remonstrance, and averring that she had her "sick sheep" to look after.

Ellice felt the strangeness growing on her again as soon as she was gone; but she made a brave effort against it and began to speak at once.

"There is one thing I want to ask you, Gordon dear —the *great hope!* It is not given up, is it?"

"Given up! No, certainly not," and in a moment a glow of color and light flashed into his face, making it quite good-looking, and so much like the Gordon of old, that Ellice instinctively drew nearer to his side, seating herself on a little stool by him as she said:

"But—Uncle Harry! He has not consented?"

"No, not yet," and he sighed, but smiled again quickly as he saw the sympathy in her face. "One can't expect to have all that one wants at once in this life,"

"But suppose he never does? Oh! poor Gordon!"

"I shall have had the ideal before me. It won't do me any harm, Lisa."

"I would rather you were spared harm in a pleasanter way," she said wistfully. "I began to think it is the waiting and hoping that has made you look so grave."

"Do I look grave? Oh no, I don't think it is that; I am only three and twenty, you know. Many men have begun later; and this life is not so likely to make me grave as that. Living is sobering work of itself; especially living in London."

"Robin says it is so lively there."

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"Oh! if he seeks for liveliness he can find it. I know that that is some men's *summum bonum*. I can't say it is mine."

"I don't think it is Robin's either," said Ellice warmly. There had been a tinge of contempt in his tone, or she fancied it, which roused her irrepressible desire for defending the absent. "He is very clever, and wants to make his name known in the world. I am so sorry he is not here; I am sure you would have liked him. But some people are lively naturally. There is no harm in it, is there?" with one of her quick upward looks into his face.

"No harm certainly; only it doesn't come into some people's line, so they needn't be pitied for the want of it."

"Don't you like being pitied, Gordon?" said Ellice curiously.

"Well, I don't think it is much good; but then I haven't had much experience of it. Sorry faces don't mend broken bones."

"If I had a broken bone I think I would rather see some faces sorry for it than anything else."

"Would you? I would rather see a skilful hand that knew how to set about the quickest way of setting it."

"I think women care more about sympathy than help."

"Very likely. I know so little about women I can't tell," said Gordon equably. Ellice felt a little chilled, but recovered herself with a backward shake of her small fair head and said brightly:

"Well, you will know more about them when Uncle Harry gives his consent and the 'hope' is realised. I shall be with you then, and will give you lessons."

"*You*, dear Lisa!" and he laughed outright. "I don't think that would be possible;" then as he saw a blank look of disappointment stealing over her face he added gently: "You are not thinking in earnest of our old childish dream, are you, little one?"

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"Oh! Gordon, of course I am," Ellice cried, almost choking. "Why, I never think of anything else. *Querido*, why shouldn't it be possible? Have we not always planned it, and how happy we should be when we were living together, I keeping house for you, and you . . . . Gordon, what do you mean? Don't you *want* me now?"

"My dear, if the 'hope' is realised I should have to want many things and—go without them."

"But not *me!* Gordon, *querido*, we always said we would keep together."

"Ah! we were children then, Lisa, and I fear I have been going on thinking of you as a child ever since."

"But I could not remain a child always; and if I had I should only have been in your way. Besides, you have grown up too. You are a man, yet it makes no difference to me. I love you the same any way."

"And don't I love you the same?" said Gordon, smiling at her. His smile was very pleasant, and he felt very kindly and affectionately to the half-petulant, half-coaxing little maiden seated so near him, and looking as Robin would have given worlds to have had her look at him. But if she had, Robin would have snatched her straightway up in his arms and promised her anything and everything she wanted; whereas Gordon, believing that this particular thing was at most a pleasant and impossible folly, had no intention of saying a single word to raise hopes which he knew would never be realised; and Ellice felt with a woman's quickness that he was feeling for, not with her, and was not comforted.

"You have changed more than I after all," she said sorrowfully.

"I am a man, as you said," Gordon answered, still smiling. "When you last saw me I dare say I was a very silly boy."

It was on Ellice's lips to say that she had been very fond of the boy, that on the whole she preferred him to the man: on her lips but not on her heart.

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Ellice had by no means a perfect temper: neither was she of those serene goddesses who are always just and never unreasonable; but she had the tenderest heart in the world, and this oft-times kept her tongue in order when that member might otherwise have been disposed to break out in an unruly spirit. Woman frequently get the reputation for being yielding, gentle, and docile when they are simply tender-hearted. They have an opinion of their own and you stamp on it. You take the trouble to explain logically and lengthily the worthlessness of their reasons for that opinion, and they yield. You think that they are convinced, that their reasons have taken in the arguments you have offered to it. Far from it! Ten to one they have not understood, or not followed a word of the proofs which you believe have confuted them; or (if they have) that the said proofs appear by no means as logical or overwhelming to them as to you. They still think you utterly wrong, and your arguments utterly absurd; but they are tender hearted, they love you; and it must be a mighty matter indeed which a loving woman will care to maintain by force of arguments at the expense of irritating or mortifying the man who is dear to her. You think that their weakness is giving way to your strength; but it is the strength of their love which is voluntarily bowing itself to your weakness for ruling. *Verbum sap.*

In the present instance Gordon was right in his own wisdom, and Ellice foolish! yet though no amount of explanations would have convinced her on that score at the moment, she only answered gently and with a flushing cheek:

"I did not think you silly then, dear, but I dare say you are more sensible now. At any rate if you do not want me——" here came a great gulp—"I will not think of it any more; but——" another gulp. Ellice's eyes were full of tears; and Gordon, horribly conscience-stricken and embarrassed, burst out:

"It is not that I don't want you. I always wanted

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you; and now that I see you I think it would be nice to have you always near me; but if the 'hope' comes true it will be impossible. You are too young to understand, and I can't explain," he was coloring like a girl as he said; "but it would not be for your good, or mine, it——"

"If it would not be for yours, that settles it," said Ellice rather proudly. 'I am sorry I said anything about it."

"But if my father lives and doesn't consent, and I go on with the engineering," said Gordon penitently still; "and if you wanted a home, then——"

"Then, of course, any idea of the sort would be quite out of the question,' Ellice interrupted, her cheeks the reddest of the two. "Do you think I only wanted to come to you for a home; or that our old engagement. . . . Oh!" breaking off suddenly, "here's the Squire!"

And there in the doorway stood Squire Herne looking in upon them.

CHAPTER XVI.

AND here I pause in my story to say a few words respecting the private life and character of Mr. Gordon Maxwell, who, though decidedly not the *jeune premier* of this history (that *role* being the one of all others he would have been most incompetent to fill), has too much to do with certain other personages in the same tale to be passed over without some special mention.

In the first place, then, and to prevent any of my readers from indulging vain anticipations that I am about to introduce them to some delightful hot-bed of of Jesuitry and intrigue—anticipation which would be cruelly disappointed, I may as well observe that young Maxwell was as worthy and straight-going a young fellow as well could be; a man who couldn't tell a lie

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to save his life, and never had told one, and who was as little capable of a mean or dirty thought as he was of planning any action for his own selfish benefit at the expense of another.

Now it is true a man may be all this—truthful, clean-minded, and unselfish, and withal never do anything noteworthy, and acquire repute in this world; or attain to canonisation in the next. Yet are these qualities not to be despised by any means, as they go farther perhaps, towards making a man a good citizen, kinsman, or spouse, than people of more brilliant merit may be willing to acknowledge. It is good to have a laced coat wherewith to show bravely before the world, but better a clean shirt, even if you be forced to wear it under a shabby mantle. The latter will make you a sweeter neighbor than he who struts in foul linen under velvet raiment.

Ever since his earliest childhood Gordon had been intended for the Church by his mother, who probably thought the education for that profession would act as a safeguard against his following in Mr. Maxwell's exceedingly wild and shaky footsteps, and indeed the little fellow took most kindly to the notion, insisted on having a tiny cassock made for him when he was still a wee child, with long fair hair floating over his shoulders, and being allowed to 'serve' at Mass in the little convent chapel hard by and got so much petted in consequence by the nuns and the portly and peculiarly unasectic-looking old *padre* attached to the establishment, that Master Gordon grew quite impatient for the time when he should be old enough to say Mass for himself in just such a chapel, and to preach to the people from the pretty white and gold pulpit which hung over the nave like the cup of a giant tiger-lily telling them not to fight or cut each other's throats, and steal papa's horses from the estancia, as was their habit at present, but be good and peaceable, and live like English people, for mamma said English people were very good: and though Padre Felipe said they

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were nothing but heretics and barbarians, who eat raw beef, walked out in the sun at mid-day, beat their wives to death, and never went to Mass, mamma *must* know a great deal better than the *padre*, seeing that she came from England, while he had never been there, and, indeed, talked of this well-beloved island of ours much as if it were the King of Dahomey's land, and as far removed from Christianity and civilisation as the pit of Tophet itself.

"When *I* am a *padre*, and have made all the Spanish people good by the beautiful sermons I will preach them," said Little Gordon, with that delicious modesty so characteristic of childhood, "I will go to Rome and ask the pope to send me to England to convert the wicked people there—for mamma says there are *some* wicked people—and tell them not to beat their wives any more; and then, when I have done that, I will come back here and be made a bishop, and have diamond buckles in my shoes, and two white kittens to sit on my knee at dinner, like *Monsignore el obispo* here," an unambitious prospect which caused little Ellice to cry out that she would be a *padre* and have white kittens too; and to burst into disconsolate weeping when informed with masculine contempt that girls *couldn't* be *padres*. Even Sister Catarina at the convent said so when he asked her why *she* never said Mass, and she must be next thing to a man for she had a grey beard, quite bristly; while Padre Felipe, poor man, had none at all; all of which, however, did not console Ellice half so much as the promise that if she would leave off crying she might get the nursery scissors and then and there cut a tonsure in hair in preparation for his after profession: a proposal which resulted in Gordon's going down to dinner with a large and mangy-looking patch of close shorn hair on the top of his little fair head, while Ellice preceeded to drag his chair to the table for him, and pour out his cup of milk, explaining triumphantly that though she couldn't be a *padre* herself, Gordon had promised that she should

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be his housekeeper—*padres* always had housekeepers —and then she could wait on him for the rest of her natural life.

I am bound to add that Mrs. Devereux and Maxwell did not see the matter in the same light, and that the juvenile ecclesiastic was punished for the sacrifice of his locks by being sent up to bed forthwith; while Ellice was mulcted of "pudding" for her share in the day's performance.

Even this cruelty, however, had no effect in quenching Gordon's enthusiasm; for the next thing he did was to calmly suggest to the old black cook that she should make her confessions to him before going to Padre Felipe, so that he might acquire a little practice in the science of hearing them; and to prove himself a very decided member of the Church militant, by chasing Ellice into a stable and thumping her vigorously because, after helping him to perch himself on the lid of a high brick well that he might preach a sermon to her, her two dolls and the cat seated below, she and pussy had got tired of the exordium before the commencememt of "secondly," and had run away to play, leaving the preacher to discourse to a couple of idiotic-looking dolls, and helpless even to come down till his wrathful shouts brought one of the servants to his assistance.

But if the idea thus early instilled showed itself at first in mere childish vagaries, it did not, like most of such fancies, fade away into oblivion as the boy grew from infancy into riper years, but rather became an active and practical part of the formation of his character, and was used by his mother, a singularly devout and high-minded woman, as the most powerful means of instilling a habit of self-denial and lofty principle *on* the boy, and for impressing on him an ideal up to which he might be safely trained to climb without seeming to reproach the father whose life was in such absolute contradiction to her whole teaching.

She died, and, in accordance with her last request.

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Gordon was sent home to a large Roman Catholic school in the north of England, Ellice clinging to his neck up to the last moment, and weeping passionately while he repeated again and again the promise that as soon as ever he was old enough to be ordained he would come back, and she should live with him and keep his house, according to their old arrangement; but in another country, among another race of boys and another race of priests, the old aim remained unaltered, the old ideal grew confirmed and strengthened, his habits, studies, and even amusements, all took their tone from the end before him; and when he was entering his seventeenth year he wrote to his father, requesting that he might be transferred to a theological college, in order that he might devote the remaining years of his education to those studies which would best prepare him for the profession he intended to embrace.

Judge, then, of the boy's feelings, of his fury and despair, when in the course of time he received an answer from his father, ridiculing the idea as an absurdity too puerile for discussion; telling him that he was a young fool, and that when he had seen a little of life he would find out as much for himself; threatening to take him away from St. Cuthbert's if he heard any more of such nonsense, and observing that if he wanted to direct his studies to any particular object, he had better do so to mathematics and engineering, as he meant to article him to a civil engineer as soon as he was eighteen: he wanted no parsons in his family to preach to their elders, and pull canting faces at everything natural and manly in life.

Poor Gordon nearly went frantic at first reading this letter. The injustice of it in upsetting by a word what had been the approved and sanctioned hope of his youth, the contempt manifested for everything *he* held best and holiest, the utter indifference with which his feelings and wishes were regarded, all stung him to the soul and roused him to passionate indignation and

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rebellion. He neither could nor would submit to such a decree, he said; and though some of his schoolfellows, with whom on account of his strictness, he was not popular, were disposed to expend no little chaff on the discomfiture of "the Saint," others took up his cause warmly and sympathetically; and none more so than the classical master, a young man himself, a recent convert: and like the generality of converts to any church, more than a little exaggerated and hot-headed in his zeal. From this gentleman the story traveled to the head-master, and here, I grieve for the boy's sake to tell it, just as his spirits had risen a little they received a second *douche.*

A very clever and a very learned man, the Rev. Northby Newark, Doctor of Divinity and senior wrangler of his college at Cambridge five-and-twenty years before: a man of the world also, calm and polished, not prone to enthusiasm, not particularly warm-hearted; but shrewd and discreet, with a great capacity for governing and a certain cool dispassionateness in arbitrating between conflicting parties which formed perhaps one of its principal component parts.

In a school at least one half managed by priests, he took it as a simple, logical sequence that at least one half of the pupils should at one time or another announce their fixed intention of joining the priesthood; and that of these at least four fifths should change that intention as soon as they returned to their families and the world from which they had been secluded.

His experience had taught him this much and he accepted it as an arithmetical certainty not as a thing to be any more surprised, pleased or annoyed at than the fact that six and six made twelve. For his own part he had no desire to make St. Cuthbert's into a seminary, and considered that Catholic laymen were quite as much required in the world as Catholic priests. It resolved itself to a question of numerals: and in this question Gordon Maxwell became merely one of the units, nothing more. Of the intense earnestness of the

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boy's feelings on the subject, of the early date of his choice of the Church as a profession, and of the almost dogged persistency with which year after year he had gone on striving towards its fulfilment, Dr. Newark knew nothing and enquired nothing.

Young lads were given to exaggeration and over-hastiness: and Gordon was in far too excited a state to be a fit judge of his own mind. What he *did* know was that Mr. Maxwell, senior, had confided his son to his care, an act (considering that the gentleman did not belong to the Mother Chruch) of great propriety and generosity, and that to repay the father's confidence by encouraging the son in flat rebellion, and inciting or even permitting him, while a pupil at St. Cuthbert's, to pledge himself to any state of life in opposition to his father's commands, would be a proceeding equally wrong and impolitic. No parent ever yet had made a complaint of the Principal of St. Cuthbert's; and no parent ever should while Dr. Newark had the honor of holding that position. So Gordon was called up to the head-master's study and told kindly, but with some peremptoriness, that it was his duty to submit himself to his father's wishes, that he was much too young to take the ruling of his life into his own hands, that when he was of age it would be another matter, and he might be at liberty to choose for himself; but not until then; and that especially while he was a student at St. Cuthbert's he was to understand himself as strictly prohibited from taking any step which could either commit him to, or lead his father to believe that he was persisting in the course which had been forbidden him.

"I do not choose to offer any opinion myself on your father's decision," said Dr. Newark, the tips of his thin, well-shaped fingers resting lightly against each other; and his stately head, silvered and lightly bald, leaning back against his chair. "Right or wrong it is he who provides for your maintenance and education; and therefore he who has the right to decide what use

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you shall make of it. Unless you give me your word to recognize his authority whilst you are under my care, I shall be under the necessity of requesting him to remove you to some other college; and further to inform you that disobedience and lawlessness are in my opinion the very surest proofs of your unfitness for the vocation you desire to embrace."

Dr. Newark was right, of course; and equally of course Gordon submitted. He was too well trained, under too perfect a code of discipline, to dream for one moment of doing otherwise; but mere duty, policy and prudence, are poor arguments for cutting your heart out and trampling on it; and his submission was that of a vanquished enemy and nothing more. He lost all pleasure in his studies and all zeal for getting on, shut himself up from his friends and companions, grew pale and gaunt and reserved; and for a time seemed as if he were in about as bad a way as a boy could be.

This passed away in the course of months. Morbid depression is too unnatural to a healthy young fellow of an active turn of mind to last any length of time; and Mrs. Devereux's and Ellice's letters were a great source of comfort to him. Both wrote with that tender, loving sympathy which only women can give in its full entirety; but while Ellice assured him again and again that "Uncle Harry" would not hold to his resolve, that he was always changing his mind from one angle to another, and that she should never let him alone till he had done so in this instance and let her darling Gordon do as he had always wanted, Mrs. Devereux wrote in a wiser key, entering indeed into his disappointment as sweetly as his own mother could have done, but commending his submission as a sacrifice to filial love which would meet a fuller reward afterwards than the more gratification of his own desire; and telling much of his father's misfortunes, of breaking health and uncertain life, and of the hope which his mother had so often expressed that he (Gordon) would

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grow up to be a comfort and support to the husband she had so dearly loved, till insensibly Gordon's heart began to lose its new bitterness, and his mind to take a new view of the position which had been so intolerable to him a little while before. Is was hard, cruelly hard to him even now; but it did not seem to him as hopelessly unalterable as before; and at any rate if he had to yield, it was better and more manly to do so in a generous spirit than by acting in a way which would make almost as wide a breach between him and his father as open rebellion. Mr. Maxwell might change his mind; and certainly his wife had always inculcated obedience and self-denial as the two most necessary virtues for a young priest; and how could he better prepare himself for even a far-away fruition of his darling hope than by practising them now? Mrs. Devereux's hint about her brother-in-law's health had shocked him. After all, his father had been a kindly, genial man, who had never beaten or been harsh to him; and he was his only son. If a sudden death, such as the doctor predicted, were to carry off the unthinking *estanciero* a month or a year hence, would not he (Gordon) bitterly regret any ill feeling or insubordination of which he might now be guilty; and would not his freedom be embittered to him by self-reproach and a sense of unfitness to possess it? The star of his chosen profession still gleamed before him through the distant darkness; he would not have given it up of his own free will for all the money or fame which any other could bring him; but in the meanwhile he would work how or where his father wished, doing his duty cheerfully and to the very best of his power, and making that duty a preparation for the reward which he still believed might some day crown his hopes.

It was in the spirit of this self-dedication that Gordon left school and entered on life in a civil engineer's office, a young man of nineteen with a soul as pure as a mother-nurtured girl, a mind as narrow as a *pig*, and

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about as much knowledge of the world he was to live in as a baby in swaddling-clothes. Sent from a foreign country to a school like St. Cuthbert's, and always intending and intended to be educated for the Church, he had not gone in for so many boyish acquaintances or amusements as the generality of his school-fellows, and had gradually lost the taste for them. He had no relations in England besides the Hernes, and some distant cousins, who probably did not know of his existence; and with the exception of a yearly hamper, and an occasional letter full of farm and household details, which read like Greek to him, from Mrs. Herne, the family at the Croft had entirely ignored him. True there was Dr. Devereux in London, who had received him on his first arrival, conveyed him to school, and told him that he was always welcome to come to them for the holidays; but though Gordon did, at his aunt's wish, take advantage of the offer and go there two or three times, the fashionable physician was far too much occupied to either see or trouble himself about the lad, leaving that to his wife and daughter; and poor Gordon, even shyer and more awkward than the generality of school-boys at the shyest and awkwardest of ages, felt so utterly like a fish out of water with a London fine lady and a pert schoolgirl, that he often remained at school by his own choice, spending his time in reading, gardening, and taking long walks with some of his resident clerical masters. The boy was a favorite with *them*, and he felt happier in their society.

These things being taken into consideration, it will be easily seen that his utter ignorance of the world when he entered on it was not as wonderful as it might otherwise appear; nor the fact that he did not get on very smoothly in it. He had made up his mind to work hard and conscientiously, and he did so; his master therefore found no fault with him. The difficulty was with his *confreres*, some three or four slightly idle and not very straight-laced youths of his own age

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and older, reared in London and "up to" everything in life.

To poor Gordon in his innocence, if you had said, "down to everything in hell," it would have read more correctly. I don't really believe that these young men were any worse than the generality of their kind; possibly rather vulgar in their tastes, probably somewhat fast in their habits, very likely with much element of good in them, and with more than one among their number who might have been solidly benefited through life by a friend clear-sighted enough to sift the good from the evil, and strong enough to fling the latter on one side, while meeting them cheerfully and heartily in all that lay on the clean side; but this was not in Gordon's power to do. It appeared to him at first sight that his fellow-clerks, and the greater portion of their friends and associates, were simply going straight to damnation; and that even his enforced companionship with them must inevitably drag him down to the same. He blushed like a girl at their anecdotes, and grew pale at the freedom of their strong expressions. Once he absolutely got up and rushed from the office to escape hearing of plans and adventures which seemed harmless enough to the tellers; and another time took a rather dirty-tongued young gentleman by the collar and put him outside his room, where the youth had been giving forth somewhat freely. It is also reported that being taken by one of his *confreres* to a certain garden of delight in the south of London, he knocked his friend down in return for the hospitality and initiation into various amusements afforded him, and walked off vowing that he would never speak to his entertainer and victim again. Certainly, if true, these incidents prove that Gordon had not lost his old predilection for the Church militant; and he was a young man of sufficient size and strength to make a blow from his hand no trifling matter. The maltreated *habitue* of Cremorne felt sick for a whole day after-

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wards, and very willingly dropped his acquaintance for the future.

But, while being gradually cut, and continually chaffed, sneered at, and ridiculed by his associates as an emblem of everything that was priggish, canting and Methodistical, these latter never guessed at the misery of disgust, loneliness, degradation, and almost despair, which was preying on the soul of the silent and stern-faced young man who was making himself so unpleasant among them. There were three temptations which continually beset him, to drown himself and be done with it, to run away and shut himself up in a monastery, or to give up struggling against the whirlwind of vice around him and sink quietly into the same slough as the others. I think myself that he deserved some credit for fighting against them, utterly alone and unhelped as he was, and conquering them as he did; also for refraining from writing to trouble his aunt and Ellice with accounts of his perplexities. Help came to him at last in the person of an old school-fellow, who was going into the Church and was boarding in the clergy-house attached to a small church in one of the poorest districts in the East End. There were other vacant rooms in the clergy-house besides those occupied by the two missionary priests who had the charge of the parish; or rather of the Roman Catholic portion of it, and Gordon's friend urged, and urged successfully, that he should come and board there also. Father Bertram would find him plenty to do for his leisure hours; lay helpers were greatly needed in the district, and he might read theology of an evening with himself and Father Lawson.

From that day Gordon was a different man. He went to the office as regularly as before and worked as hard as ever. That was his duty; but as soon as ever office hours were over he turned his back on his fellow-clerks and was off to the East End, where, what with district work, night-schools and Sunday-schools, and studies in divinity, he hardly found time

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for even a short night's rest; and was as busy and as happy as a bee. His old associates ceased to trouble him; and he troubled himself no more about them. He got back his color and energy, sang to himself in his little room up in the roof, and wrote such cheerful letters to South America that Ellice who had never ceased sorrowing over his disappointment, began at last to comfort herself with the hope that he had got over it.

And yet all this while he had not a single friend outside the clergy-house, hardly a single acquaintance, and never spoke to a woman in his own class of life. Somewhere or another he had read that the less young men intending themselves for the priesthood mixed, themselves up with womankind, the better for them; and considering himself as destined for that vocation in however distant a future, he had determined to apply the rule to himself. It cost him nothing to make the resolution, as, when he had made it, he was at the age when a lad feels himself most awkward and helpless in a lady's society, and looks on the fair sex generally as a race of beings infinitely more terrible than the lions and tigers at the Zoo; and though he grew out of this stage, "*l'appetit qui*" (to quote a French saying) *vient en mangent*," for want of ever being fed never came to him at all. Of the lower order of women, good and bad, (and the people clustered in courts and alleys round St. Etheldreda's were the very lowest and poorest) he saw plenty; and would think nothing of helping an old worn-out Irish-woman to carry her basket up a steep flight of stairs to the garret where she dwelt, or of putting his hand on the shoulder of some young girl lingering outside a low tavern or music-hall and bidding her to go home to bed; more than once, when they had no home, giving them the price of a night's lodging in some decent house; and seeing them inside the door thereof with great gentleness and courtesy.

But his intercourse with even this class was naturally

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very limited; and of any other he knew absolutely nothing; and as he never went among them, and had never read a novel or seen a play in his life, he was not likely to be in the way of learning. It might be well for him in some ways; for I fancy the conversation of not a few of our frisky matrons and "go-ahead" young ladies of this nineteenth century might have shocked his uneducated spirit almost as much as that of his fellowclerks, and gone far to destroy that simple reverence for womanhood which came naturally to one who looked on the sex as divided between Marys and Magdalens, and expected to find a Madonna in each poor working woman with her baby in her arms, and a St. Agnes in every flippant girl dawdling along the Row of a summer morning. Certainly Mrs. Devereux and Lyle, whom he did see at rare intervals, reminded him neither of the Mother of Sorrows, nor the virgin saint. In fact they represented something so new and out of his comprehension as rather to disturb his mind: people who lived in the world and yet seemed to have no work in it, and no share in all that made it sweetest and most worthy to him. He was glad to get away from them and back to his books and labor; and felt in nowise tempted to break his resolve and go in for feminine society after one of these visits, which, to speak the truth, were as much an infliction to his entertainers as himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

THIS, then, was Gordon Maxwell's life. This was how he had grown into manhood. He was nearly four-and-twenty now; and the "great hope," as Ellice called it, though no nearer than when he was seventeen, was still the one goal to which all his actions tended, and on which his eyes rested in the future as steadily as though he had not long ceased to struggle against

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the prohibition which held him from it. He knew now, and had realised for some time, that Mr. Maxwell was not likely to change his mind respecting his future; and farther, that his father's dissipated habits, added to certain unlucky speculations, made it exceedingly likely that the young man's earnings might, in course of time, become the chief source of maintenance for both, and the father himself become, if he were not removed by a sudden death, helplessly dependent on his son's care and affection. He knew this, and so differently had he learnt to think on the matter that, had he been permitted, he would even have given up his much-loved work in London, and sailed at a day's notice to join his father in Uruguay; not as a missionary, tonsured and cassocked, according to his boyish dreams, but as son and helper, farmer and sheep-breeder, and carrying out that truest and most old-fashioned of proverbs, "Charity begins at home," with an entire unconsciousness that in so doing he was fulfilling a higher and more truly missionary work than many a black-frocked priest, or minister of the S. P. G.

This, however, as we have seen by the letters between him and Ellice, was not to be; although on the chance of his father sending for him, and with that tireless energy which made Gordon's mania for every sort of work almost fatiguing to minds of less "ten-horse" power, he had lately made a point of studying the physical and political history of Uruguay thoroughly, and of acquiring as much knowledge of agriculture as he could obtain, having come to the opinion (one held, I believe, by many wise and more experienced men) that to turn the broad and fertile plains of his native country into golden cornfields, to exchange the mounted shepherds and knife-and-lasso-equipped *vaqueros* for peaceful husbandmen, to fence in and till the vast tracks over which half-savage troops of disbanded and revolutionary soldiery now gallop unchecked by walls or barriers of civilization, and to introduce a new scope for labor, which should turn the

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tide of emigration to this rich and wasted country, and so purify it by a natural revolution from the evils which have made it the wreck it is, was the one hope left for it; and a surer and more practical hope than if Ignatius or Savonarola were to rise from the grave and preach a new gospel of reform to the degenerate descendants of their old-world congregations.

The news of Mrs. Devereux's death was a shock to him. The affection for his aunt and cousin, maintained by a constant correspondence on both sides during nearly twelve years' separation, was indeed the one soft spot of home personality left in Gordon's nature. He loved Ellice's mother almost like his own, and her loss only drew doubly close the ties which already bound him to the girl to whom he had always been so dear. True, he never realised,even while expecting from Ellice a woman's judgment and rectitude, that she was in truth anything but the child he had left her. What, as we have seen, did he know of children or women either? and much that he could not understand in her letters—girlish fancies and pretty, poetical thoughts, and those feelings which almost sweeter than poetry, because so natural to young, womanly women —read like Greek to him, poor fellow, who had never known the softening and refining influence of heart and mind, of graceful and gentle-natured woman, and were put aside in the ignorance which seemed to him like wisdom, as mere childish folly, babblings which it was beneath the diginity of a man to waste his time in striving to unravel or decipher.

To find, then, that Ellice, the simple child, cousin, and playmate, whom he had lectured and counselled so long, had grown into a young woman of the upper classes, one of those fair and awful beings with whom, of all God's creatures, he felt he had least in common, was at first almost as much of a disappointment as a shock to him. Why, but for little difference of voice and face, matters really beneath your notice, she might be just such another girl as Lyle Devereux, who, though

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the doctor was dead, still lived with her mother in Kensington, and was spoken of as a very pretty and charming girl. Possibly she was. Little as he thought of such qualities, even he in his rare visits recognized that she was very different now from the flippant school-girl who used to tease him about his big feet and red-hot ultramontanism, and make him feel more bashful than any one else. She was kinder now, very kind, and most sweet and gracious; but it was dangerous tasting sweetness, which somehow did not still come up to his image of St. Agnes, and which he could not at all reconcile with his ideal of the "Cousin Lisa" after whom she used to inquire so prettily.

No, it was a great shock, and though it passed away after a time, for the moment he felt cruelly robbed and cheated in being given this pretty, slender maiden, in fashionably tight-fitting raiment, with soft rufflings at throat and wrist, instead of the round-faced, short-frocked little girl of his remembrance; while her reminder of his old promise that when he was ordained they should live together filled him with nothing short of consternation, as he conjured up a vision of the clergy-house, with Father Bertram and his severe and ascetic assistance, Father Lawson, at either side of the table and this graceful young woman, with the long-trained dress and painted fan hanging from her girdle, at the head, doing the honors in their grim and uncarpeted little parlor. Gordon had seen a good deal of priests' housekeepers in the course of his English life, and not even Mrs. Dion Boucicault's charming impersonation of the character in the "*Shaughraun*" would have persuaded him that the individual in question could be otherwise than on the shady side of fifty, and ugly and withered to correspond.

"If she were only my sister, or some poor squinting or deformed girl, that people could say nothing against!" was the thought in his mind while poor Ellice urged her tender pleading on him; but as she was, and even as she would be ten years hence, how

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would it be possible? Would he not be a young man and she a pretty young woman still? The idea was simply absurd, and not to be glanced at by a would-be missionary, strongly impressed with every stern rule and counsel ever laid down for the guidance of the junior clergy; and though his intense respect for her sex and innocence prevented him from even explaining to her the grounds for his refusal, he was himself almost as innocent in his degree—for, for the first time in his life he caught himself almost regretting that he had chosen the only profession which (in *his* eyes) need prevent his giving her the brotherly protection and home she craved for. Ellice was wiser in her knowledge of the social *convenances*, and she only forgot her youth and fair face in looking forward to his ordination as the *one* thing which could enable her to go and keep house for her adopted brother without fear of Mrs. Grundy's censures.

A couple of simple young fools both, and. . . . But all this while we are keeping the Squire at the door!

He came up just in time to hear the words "our old engagement," and his red face grew somewhat redder than usual, and his voice gruffer as he said with a sort of embarrassed stiffness:

"Excuse, me young people, if I'm interrupting talk. Be this my wife's nephew!"

"Gordon Maxwell, Sir, yes," said Gordon rising, and Ellice rose too, blushing with eagerness to introduce "her" Gordon, and with a little innocent pride in his great height and strength as he stood up before her; but somewhat nervous withal lest the Squire should be disappointed at seeing no sign of the golden curls and slender limbs, for the absence of which she had hardly yet consoled herself. That there *was* disappointment, even to bewilderment, in the old gentleman's face she with her woman's quickness saw at a glance, and it made her tremble. He shook hands indeed with his guest, and said a civil word or two of welcome without much sound of meaning in them;

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but the young man's hearty grip in answer seemed to confuse his mind still more; and just as Ellice was feeling ready to cry with nervousness lest he should have repented him of his hospitality, and be annoyed by her cousin's presence, he turned to a chair and dropping heavily into it said with almost a groan:

"Zounds! but this beats all; an' a might as well be dead an' buried as see the whole world turned upside down this fashion. Just see to this now, a foreigner *an'* a papist. an' more Saxon-like to look at than my own lawfully begotten flesh an' blood. Eh for the deceitfulness o' this world! There, sit ye down yoong man sit ye down an' don't mind me. I'm glad to see ye, an' I bid ye welcome heartier than I thought for; for I can't but credit ye mun have some good under a sandy head an' a clean-shaved jowl. Lord! look to the fists o' him! What a sin an' shame not to ha' sent ye to a good Saxon grammar-school. Why, I'd ha' had ye here all your holidays, then, and wi' that back an' muscle, zounds but I'd ha' made a varmer out o' ye by now!"

"I might have been a worse thing," said Gordon quietly. The greeting had considerably surprised him; but his nerves were considerably steadier than Ellice's; and he took it with cool equanimity. "Farming is just what I want to study at present in case I should have to go abroad again; and though it is too late for the grammar-school I think———"

"Ye'd be none the worse for a few wrinkles on English varming," put in the Squire with a grin. "Eh, I wish my Rob 'ould say as much; but as our parson 'd say, wi' that two-penny halfpenny build, an' a curled head chock full o' po'try, what could ye expect? Not that I blame the wife for 'it, mind you. She's a good woman an' a honest one; an' I'm bound would ha' served me better, an' she *could* poor thing; but 'tis a danged hard thing for a man to see his own litter wi' less mark o' the breed in them nor if they'd been born in Hong Kong or Jerusalem the Golden, while a furri-

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ner *an'* a papist comes in lookin' fur a' the world like your own ploughman biled down into a gentleman wi' his Sunday coat on."

"Oh! guardian, I don't think Gordon's like a ploughman at all," interrupted Ellice, offended at what seemed to her a very dubious compliment. She had already winced at his hit at Robin: but shrank with instinctive delicacy from defending a man's own son against his father. The Squire looked at her in surprise.

"An' what better could he be like, Maid Ellice? What were our forefathers; an' what ha' we all here sproong from but the ceorls of old who each ploughed his own land an' tilled his own field within the 'mark' o' the village belongin' to him an' his kinfolk? Never ye mock, my wench, at the race who gave a name to your country, an' made the title o' 'Englishman' one to be feared by other men. An' as for thee, lad, come out wi' me an' see the old homestead an' thou likest. Eh, but may's the day thy father, silly man, has tramp-round it at my side."

He turned out into the sunshine clapping the low felt hat on to his grey head as he spoke; and Gordon followed with a ready "Thank you, sir." He must have forgotten Ellice for the moment; for he never even looked behind; or he would have seen that he was leaving a puzzled and hurt face behind him. Ellice, indeed, did not at all understand being deserted in this unceremonious fashion, and strangely enough the first thought that rose to her mind was, "Robin wouldn't have done it. Robin would never have left me so soon and gone to look at crops and cattle after we had been parted for so many years. The Squire says his head is chock full of poetry; but if being chock full of poetry—'*chock*,' what a funny word!—means liking to stay with women and talk to them, and be kind and affectionate to them—then I think poetry is a very nice thing! and I like it. It was not kind of the Squire to sneer at his own son to a visitor. Poor Robin! I will tell Gordon how good and clever he is, even if he

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doesn't care about cows and rickyards. *Ay de mi!* is it possible that Gordon cares more for those sort of things than he does for me?"

It might be possible; but it was not true. Indeed he was thinking of Ellice at that moment, wishing that she had not looked so unhappy when he pooh-poohed her idea of living with him. He didn't usually make people unhappy; but perhaps he ought to have guessed that she would not remain a child; and not have encouraged her fanciful chimeras. It was thinking this that made him suddenly observe:

"My cousin Lisa has grown a pretty girl, has she not? a girl that any one would say was pretty, don't you think so, sir?"

"Aye, 'tis a comely wench enow," said the Squire, smiling grimly at the young man's inability to keep his admiration to himself. "'Tisn't likely though as you'd think otherwise any way, eh, lad?"

Gordon meditated a moment. He seldom answered in a hurry.

"Well, no; I suppose I should like her looks, if I thought about them, whatever they were. In fact," after another moment's thought, "I'm not sure that I should not like them better if they were what people call plain. She does not want looks. By the way, is she not coming with us?" and he looked back at the house which they had left some distance in the rear. The Squire was now laughing heartily. This young man was dreadfully in love, as he thought, and more innocent than any yokel at concealing it.

"No, no," he said, clapping Gordon on the shoulder and grinning all over his broad red face. "Let the lass be for the present. She's too much sense to come taking up your mind when she knows ye ought to be giving it to more serious matters. Ye'll have your fill o' her afore ye go, my lad, an' she knows it. Coom along wi' me now, and put the women-folk out o' y' head."

And Gordon smiled assentingly and walked on.

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That he had not the least idea of his uncle's meaning need not be said; but the final counsel, to attend to the object in hand, and keep woman out of his mind, was one too well drilled into him already not to be acted on almost by intuition; and indeed he was soon sniffing the country air and bending his head to poke into pigsties and fowl-houses with a delight and interest which was hardly inferior to that of the Squire himself.

"What, Gordon left thee to go out wi' the master?" said Mrs. Herne as she came into the parlor about twenty minutes later, and found Ellice sewing at a piece of plain needlework, with a pretence of as much energy and interest as if there were no one she cared for nearer than San Francisco. "Nay then, lovey; don't ye mind about that. "Twas the wisest thing he could if father offered it; as I doubt not he knew well enow o' himself. Trust me, Ellice, the lad's wit enow to tell 'tis the best plan to please old folk first if ye want to get your way wi' the young ones afterwards."

"Gordon wanted to see the farm. He wants to learn all about that sort of thing in case Uncle Harry asks him to go home to him. I think it's very sensible, don't you?" said Ellice, trying to speak rather more cheerfully than usual. Mrs Herne laughed and shook her head.

"I don't believe he wants any such thing now, at all events; an' I doubt he'd much rather be here wi' you, but you're right all the same, lassie dear. 'Twas sensible an' wise o' the lad not to be fool enow to say so, as our Robin would have done, an' vex the Squire; an' he so huffy as he is at times, dear man."

But Mrs. Herne was wrong, as wrong as the Squire himself. They all made their theories about this young fellow, and none of them were right; and all thought they understood him perfectly, and were as much out as he would have been had he attempted to guess at their reasoning by the light of his own simplicity. Ellice, however, was comforted by the present

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surmise, although even to her it did not savour exactly of Gordon; and suddenly recollecting that Margaret was ill in bed, and that in the excitement of her cousin's coming she had not thought of her for the last two hours, inquired how she was, offering to go up to her. Mrs. Herne looked grave.

"Nay, dearie, she bid me go away myself, for she wanted to sleep; but for that matter I could ha' kep' to my darning an' made no noise; an' 'tis not like sleeping she looks any way, tossin' about, an muttering an' will-nigh wrigglin' herself out o' the blankets every minute. Dear, but 'tis well she isn't often ill; though maybe she'd know better how to bear it i' that case, poor child. Ellice, dost know if she wanted to go anywhere in particular to-day?"

"Go anywhere? No, auntie, why?"

"Well, I'll tell 'ee, because she do keep muttering, not once but several times, 'To-day of all days. If t' had been any other day, but *to-day* to be ill!' so by-'m-bye I asked her 'Did ye want to do anything special then to-day lovey?'"

"And what did she say? Perhaps it was Gordon's coming she was thinking of?" said Ellice, naturally of opinion that as that event was so intensly important to herself it must have an exciting effect on others. Mrs. Herne shook her head.

"Nay, I can't tell; for she only flounced out at me fur asking. Maggie do flounce out dreadful, wit'out meaning sometimes," put in the mother apologetically; "but I don't think 'twas that; for when I wanted to tell her about him, what a fine, big fellow he was, an' all that, she didn't seem able to listen; an' 'twas then she asked me to go down an' leave her quiet. She meant it too, or I wouldn't ha' gone. Ellice love, I wonder if thou'dst do something for me?"

Ellice said she would gladly.

"'Tis to go to the village; but thee's had no walk to-day, an' once the master's got Gordon out i' the

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fields wi' him, he'll not let him go this hour; but don't 'ee go if thee thinks he might come in."

"I don't think he will; and I'd like to go anyhow, Aunt Maggie. I suppose it's the excitement; but I can't keep quiet any more than Margaret. What is it you want?"

It was many things, a draught to be made up for the sick girl, a post-office order to be cashed, and some spotted muslin for windowblinds to be bought. Ellice undertook them all very cheerfully. As she said, sitting still was more difficult to her than anything else that day. Yet it seemed strange, too, for her to be walking alone down the high-road, while Gordon, her Gordon, for whose coming she had hoped and waited so long, was tramping about the Croft meadows almost within hail of her.

The sun shone hotly on her head, and the feathery bunches of wild clematis and tangled wreaths of bryony adorning the hedgerows were white with dust. All the gay spring and early summer blossoms had been burnt up long before. Only the sturdy scabious reared its round lilac head on grassy banks, and the autumn crocus and pitcher-shaped blossoms of white campion made bright the meadows where cowslips and buttercups were flourishing awhile ago; the flat green bunches of the elderberries were changing into black and their stalks to red; and the blackberries were losing their rosy coloring in a deeper and more luscious dye, suggestive of feasts to come, of purple lips and stained dresses. The cornfields were alive with people, men reaping, and women and children gleaning fast behind their steps. Some of the women had a baby strapped against their bosoms or on their backs, and were holding another, barely able to toddle, by the hand, while two or three hardly bigger ran behind, gathering up the scattered brown ears in their chubby hands. Under the hedge little encampments of blue pocket-handkerchiefs and big red jugs might be seen at intervals, guarded by a rough cur who sprang up barking as

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Ellice stopped to look at him; or Miss Amadrew drove by in her pretty ponychaise, her graceful smile and bow hardly visible to the other girl through the cloud of white dust which surrounded her. Somehow her passing brought a little momentary pang to Ellice's heart, and took the brightness out of the autumn day. She did not stop to analyse the reasons why. What had Miss Amadrew ever been but pleasant and amiable to her? Robin would be very fortunate if he were to win such a sweet and gracious maiden for a wife; and it would be nice for Ellice to go and stay at the Hall, as perhaps, if that were settled, she might; but though she smiled she shook her head resolutely at Miss Amadrew's offer to take her up, although the latter was going the same road as herself, and trudged on feeling rather more sober than before, and more inclined to wish Gordon were with her. It was his absence that made her feel so dull; and certainly it was rather selfish of the Squire to have taken him away.

She had done her other errands and was just writing out the post-office order for the benefit of the girl of thirteen who helped her mother in that department, when the good woman came up to her, inquiring after the health of the family at the Croft.

"I hope they be all purely well, miss; Mr. Robin an' Miss 'Erne an' all. Ye do be looking more buxom yourself nor ye did awhile back."

"Yes, English air agrees with me, Mrs. Pounce," said Ellice, smiling and giving in her order; "but Miss Herne is not well at all. She is in bed with a dreadful cold. We hope it isn't going to be anything serious; but one can't say, you know, with those sort of things. She's quite feverish to-day."

"Dear heart, ye dawn't zay so! Poor lass! (saving your presence, miss) I do be mortal sorry to 'ear that'n. Ill abed! Well, that bean't like her of ordinary; an' not like to be out, I dare to say, fur a day or two?"

"I'm afraid not," said Ellice; and Mrs. Pounce looked more concerned than before. The good woman

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seemed to have something on her mind, for she fidgeted and cleared her throat more than once, and then, just as Ellice was leaving the shop, called her back with rather a flurried countenance.

"Miss, I beg your pardon," she said, leaning over the counter so as to speak lower, and turning her head from side to side as if to make sure no one else was within hearing; "but I thought I'd better tell you. I've a letter here, come fur Miss 'Erne; an' if so be as she's goin' to be laid up awhile, mayhap I'd better ast you to give it 'er."

"For Miss Herne? Oh, certainly. Give it me," said Ellice, holding out her hand; but though Mrs. Pounce had the letter in her own, she hesitated a moment before giving it up.

"You see, miss, it mought be of import to her; an' you're her frien,' I know, sn' like as no in all her confidences. Young gals—ladies I should say, askin' your pardon, miss,—do always tell each other their secrets; otherways I wouldn't ha' asked you to ha' took it."

"But it's no trouble, Mrs. Pounce. Of course Miss Herne will want her letter;" and this time Ellice got it, the good woman being too civil to keep her holding out her hand any longer.

"Yes, miss, but you see it ben't addressed to the Croft; but 'ere at the post-office "*to be called for*;" an' Miss Herne, when she came for the fust one, she told me to be sure an' be kurful to keep any sich for 'er alone an' not sen' 'em up to the house wi' the rest; but if so be as she's ill, an' maybe, as I said, 'tis of import——"

Ellice was getting a little puzzled, nothing more: for not understanding much of the way letters reach their owners in England, she was thinking more of how long she had been gone, and whether Gordon would have come in from the farm and be looking for her.

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Pounce," she said hurriedly. "Of course I'll take it. Miss Herne only meant you to be careful lest letters should get lost that were not ad-

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dressed to her properly;" and she was turning away when Mrs. Pounce answered, shaking her head somewhat emphatically;

"No, miss, 'twern't that'n she meant; an' if so be you wouldn't mind givin' it 'er on the quiet like, I'd be real obliged, for surely I'd be loth to offend Miss 'Erne an' oh! miss, I've a great respec' for the Squire an' your aunt, an' I wouldn't say a word to grieve un anyways: but a young lady like you, as knows what's what, mought just say a word friendly like wi' Miss 'Erne. Tain't well fur 'er to be out i' the fields night hours, miss, an' she won't get no good by it; she won't indeed. Good-morning to 'ee, Miss Pelter. I hopes I see you well, m'm."

She had turned away quickly to greet the little old maid who had just entered the shop; and after a hasty salutation to the latter, Ellice retired. She was really puzzled now, and if Miss Pelter had not come in would have felt half inclined to put the letter down on the counter and say she preferred having nothing to do with it. She had not liked, however, to do so before an acquaintance, especially a person of the spinster's lively curiosity; and having hurried away on the impulse of the moment, felt it impossible to return. Still the letter burnt in her hand; and her mind was full of uncomfortable questioning. Could this letter have anything to do with the one Margaret has posted to some Gerrant Esq., Mitcham, and which she had seemed so anxious Ellice should not see, and what *did* Mrs. Pounce mean by the "fields at night?" Margaret never walked out in the field at night, she was always first in bed; and then, involuntarily, her eyes fell on the envelope she was carrying, and she saw that the postmark was Mitcham; and her uncomfortableness strengthened. Gordon was standing at the gate of the long meadow looking out for her as she came up; and the sight of his clear, plain, truthful face was a real comfort to her. She had always, as we have seen, consulted him in all her little difficulties that were

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worth putting to paper; and had taken his counsel as gospel, wishing that she had him at her side to direct her in every matter, however trifling. Now he *was* at her side; and on the impulse of the moment she poured out her puzzle to him, asking him what Mrs. Pounce could have meant, and whether she had done wrong in taking the letter.

"Ought I to have left it? what do you think, Gordon? But perhaps I oughtn't to have asked you—perhaps you would rather not say?" Ellice cried with a little impatience as, despite her questioning eyes and repeated pauses for help, Gordon made no effort to interrupt her, but remained staring at the sky with his face slightly turned from her, and a decided frown on his brow. He was not, however, a man to be hurried by any girlish impatience. True, the impulse to answer had risen very quickly to his lips; but to decide anything on impulse was contrary to the most fundamental of this young man's rules for self-guidance. He must think a question over, look at it on both sides, and weigh it well beforehand; and it was not till Ellice had said again in a tone of some mortification:

"Ought I not to have asked you? I am sorry to see you look vexed," that he answered, with a slight wave of his hand to quiet her.

"I am not sure that you ought. It is not my affair or yours, and I had rather you had not mentioned it to me. As it is, however, I think you had better take the letter straight upstairs to your cousin. In your place, *I* should have left it at the office, and simply told her it was there, and what the woman said."

"Oh dear, would you? Then I wish I had done so," cried Ellice distressedly.

"Mind, I do not say I should have been right," said Gordon, with another little calming gesture of his hand. "That would almost imply—not quite, but almost—that there was something wrong in the secret, if it is a secret and of course it is possible for a person to have a letter addressed to her at a post-office from per-

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fectly innocent motives. It might even be from praiseworthy ones."

The color flushed quickly to Ellice's face. It had not occurred to her before that Margaret had directed the letter to be addressed to the office; and frank and guileless as she was, she was no fool, and had not forgotten the discussion about the unknown artist, and that other letter. It was horrid to be so suspicious, and Gordon's grave voice and slowly spoken words did not help to set her at ease. She was still hesitating, when he said somewhat abruptly:

"You are going to her at once, I suppose," and turned towards the house as if he considered the matter done with. Ellice determined that it should be, so far as she was concerned, and ran quickly upstairs. Margaret's door, however, was open, and she could hear Mrs. Herne's voice speaking within. Mrs. Pounce's last words recurred to her, and she hesitated. Would it not be unkind, and perhaps make some *disagreeability*, if she were to disregard them, and give Margaret the letter before her mother? Supposing even that it were a secret, might it not, as Gordon said, be a very innocent one; perhaps even some pleasant surprise for the family, and how nasty it would be of her (Ellice) to spoil it. She stood hesitating on the landing till Mrs. Herne came out rather suddenly. and seeing Ellice, asked her if she was going into *Madgie:* Ellice said "yes" with a very red face, and Mrs. Herne hurried off downstairs, leaving her the opportunity she wanted. Yet her cheeks were still deeply dyed, and there was a manifest constraint in her manner as going up to Margaret's bed she held out the missive, saying:

"Here is a letter for you, Maggie. Mrs. Pounce said it was addressed to the office to be called for, and so she had not sent it up with the others; but when she heard you were ill she thought you might like me to give it you. She said that I——" and there she stopped short, wishing the unpleasant letter was at the bottom of the sea, for Margaret sprang up in the bed,

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her eyes glittering with excitement, and her whole body in a tremble.

"*A letter!*" she cried, stretching out both her feverish hands to snatch it. "Oh, give it me quick! No, hush! shut the door first, there is some one on the stairs, and—and, Ellice, I don't want you to stay; only wait one moment. Don't tell any of them you brought it me, will you? Promise me you'll not. It—it's only about my own affairs; but don't say anything about it. Promise me!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ABOUT as beautiful a thing as there well can be, is an early morning in September; the sky a pale, delicate blue, dappled over with small rosy-tinted clouds; the green earth and broad fields—some still golden with the ungathered harvest, some brown with stubble, and "bushed" by prudent sportsmen—still covered with a light, silvery mist, getting thinner and more transparent as it rises higher, until sucked into the genial rays of the sun shining down upon high-piled ricks and laden fruit trees, it melts into a clear, golden haze; the air still soft and warm, but with a slight crispness withal, reminding an early riser of autumn's approaching footsteps; roses still hanging on the walls in great clusters of late blown white or pinky blossoms, and stewing the ground at every breath of wind with faint-hued petals, pale ghosts of the past June glories; grapes ripening in the hot-houses; peaches hanging their heads, heavy and luscious, and tempting children's fingers as they turn up their downy red cheeks from under a chaste cover of long, dark green leaves; magnolias spreading out the tropical splendour of their huge, wax-white cups, and filling the air with a very weight of fragrance; cocks crowing and hens clucking in the farmyards; far away, first one faint "crack,"

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and then another sharper and nearer, and followed by a tiny puff of white smoke over a distant chalk-pit, testimonies to the impatience of some early-rising sportsman; old Bess, the Squire's ancient pointer, blind and lame now, and fast sinking into that "bourne whence no '*dog*' returns," wrinkling her ears at the sound, and opening her sightless eyes as she lies on the doorstep basking in the warm rays of the sun—could you or any one wish for a fairer or a more peaceful scene to present to the eyes of a Londoner like Gordon, long inured to dusty streets and smoke-blacked houses, and who had spent all the hottest part of the summer between the grim, map-hung walls of an engineer's office in the city, and the foulest courts and alleys of one of the most poverty-stricken London districts!

He had risen with the sun, as was his custom, and having conscientiously achieved an hour's reading with his back to the latticed casement and its framework of wooing roses tapping their clustered white faces against the panes as if pleading for admittance, had closed the book, laid it aside, and putting another under his arm, had gone quietly downstairs and was standing just within the porch, gloating greedily over the scene and sounds around him, when his attention was attracted by a slight noise in his rear, and turning round he saw—an apparition.

A tall girl, unusually tall and dark, with sombre, heavy-lidded eyes and a hot red flush in either cheek, was just setting one foot in the hall off the lowest step of the stairs; a girl, hatted and wrapped in a shawl, but stepping carefully, as if not to make a noise, with slippers on her feet and a pair of boots in her hand. He had never seen her before, but the first glance recalled Ellice's description sufficiently to assure him that she was no servant, and he stepped back into the hall, holding out his hand and addressing her by name.

"You are my cousin Margaret, are you not?" he said.

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I do not know how it was that she had not seen him before. Perhaps the door-post had in some way shielded him as he stood on the step outside; but she started back so violently as almost to lose her balance, and stood clutching the bannister with her disengaged hand and with a wild look in her eyes like one detected in a crime and uncertain whether to brave it out.

"Who are *you?* I don't know you," she retorted, speaking almost in a whisper and looking at him fiercely.

"Gordon Maxwell," he said, smiling a little and coming nearer. "You have never seen me; but I thought you would guess. I knew you from Ellice's letters."

"Oh! *Ellice's* cousin," and the color which had fled out of her face, leaving it deadly pale, came back again in a hot rush. "Yes, I had forgotten about you," and her expression did not betoken any pleasure at the remembrance. "What are doing out there? It is too early to be down yet. It is hardly half-past six. Why did you get up?"

"I always get up early, and I came down because, like you, I suppose, I wanted to enjoy the morning air," he answered, his calm, blue eyes noting with a little surprise the irritation in her own and the haggard look of her face. "One does not come out to this sort of thing in London."

"You would get sick of coming out to nothing else if you lived here," she said sharply. "It wasn't worth getting up for."

"Humph! *I* think it was. Besides, you have done the same."

"That has nothing to do with you," her great eyes flashing suspiciously on him. "I—I often do. I—I wanted the air. Ellice won't be down for an hour and a half yet. You had much better turn in again till she does."

"Am I in your way then here?" said Gordon simply. "I will go upstairs if I am; but I thought perhaps you were going for a walk, and would let me go

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with you. You hardly look well enough for it though."

"No, I am not well enough," she was still biting her lips and twisting her hand round the carved head of the banister. "I have been ill, and they make one's room so stifling, I wanted air. I have had enough, now, so I am going back."

"Not because I am here, are you?" said Gordon gently. This girl with the wild eyes and strange manner interested him as no pretty, well-bred young lady could have done. This was an angry *baffled* look in her face, like that he had once seen in a woman stopped on the point of drowning herself; "because I will go upstairs at once when you have shaken hands with me. I have plenty to do there." He put out his hand as he spoke, and as Margaret, somewhat ungraciously laid hers within it, he muttered to himself, "Feverish. Yes, I thought so by her look."

"I think you are wise not to go out," he added aloud. "I'm sure you are not fit for it."

"I told you I was not going," she retorted; "you can see for yourself if you like. I want air and I mean to take it," and she sat down on the stairs, leaning her head wearily against an upper one. Gordon looked round, shut the best parlor and dining-room doors, which were both open, looked down the lobby to see if the one leading to the farmyard, was closed; and then came up to her as she sat gazing at him with a sort of uneasy alarm, and said:

"There! I don't think you're in a draught now; but I hope you won't sit there long. And would you mind moving while I pass you?"

"What do you want to pass for?"

"I want to go back to my reading upstairs."

"Can't you read here?"

"I *could;* but I think you would rather I didn't; and I would just as soon be there."

"*I* don't want you to go away," she said languidly.

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"Since you are here you might as well stop. I shan't ——long."

"And very right of you. You look as if you ought to be in bed still."

"I hope you didn't come here to look after me?"

"No; I came to see Lisa, and because your father asked me."

"And I suppose you got up early to think about her? Perhaps she was to come down to meet you! *That's* why you tell me I ought to be in bed!" and she laughed harshly. Gordon looked at her, an almost compassionate smile on his grave face.

"You are quite wrong. Why should I get up to meet Ellice when I can see her all day long and every day when I am here? If she were to come down though, I should be very glad; for there are a good many things I still want to hear about home and friends; and that sort of thing is not interesting to strangers."

"And of course '*that sort of thing*' is all you care to talk about to her when you get her alone," said Margaret with another short laugh. Her annoyance at this man's presence made her take a sort of pleasure in exposing his lover's shams," as she called them. "And he has no excuse, like Nino, for hiding up things," she said to herself. Gordon met her laugh with the same cool serenity.

"That, and any other private interests of hers and mine. I don't think they are many. You, a girl like herself, are likely to know most of hers. She was only a little child when I last saw her, you know."

"And yet you loved her then and have gone on loving her ever since!" said Margaret wonderingly.

"Why not? Would you expect your brother to leave off loving you if you were away from him for some years?"

"You are not Ellice's brother," the girl broke in impatiently; then, with a sudden change of tone: "But it doesn't matter. Why shouldn't you call yourself so?

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I've nothing to do with your affairs any more than you with mine. I hate interference."

"That depends on what interference means," said Gordon quietly.

"*I* know what it means," retorted Margaret; "and I won't bear it or stand it from any one, outsiders or non-outsiders."

"Sympathy and helpfulness are interference in one sense," said Gordon, smiling, "and I have often been very glad of them, even from outsiders—meaning people not belonging to me. But then I haven't any one belonging to me here," added the young fellow simply.

There was something in his tone which struck Margaret's strange nature. She looked at him more gently than she had done before.

"You are not a bit like what I thought you would be —even outside," she said abruptly.

"Indeed?" very quietly and without much interest.

"I thought you would be a small, smooth, sly little man, and I hated the very thought of you."

He burst out into a hearty, boyish laugh.

"Well, that was sensible! You made up a fancy picture and then set to work to quarrel with it. Is that your usual way with strangers?"

"No, we don't usually have strangers here; but I thought anyhow that you'd be all hung round with crosses and crucifixes and rosaries and—and all those sort of things."

"A walking Catholic repository, in fact, with all my goods hung out in the shop window," said Gordon, laughing, though a little vexedly.

"I don't know what that is," said Margaret staring.

"No, you don't know, a great many things. I expect. Never mind me; I'm your cousin, and you see what I'm like. Can't you forget what you fancied me, and try to feel kindly and pleasantly to me as your father and mother do?"

"Father wouldn't have felt pleasantly to you, don't think it, if you *had* had a lot of crosses and things fast-

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ened to you," said Margaret shrewdly; "but you haven't got one that I can see."

"No, I haven't. It's only the new shops that need to go in for walking posters. Old-fashioned firms can stand without advertising."

There was a decided sharpness in his tone now. If master Gordon had a weakness it was an over-due aptitude to bristle up in offence, where none was meant, at the slightest allusion to the Church to which he belonged: a complaint which (with all due deference to very worthy people) I have observed to be rather generally indigenous among the Roman Catholics of this country; a kind of *noli me tangere* thin-skinnedness which has not perhaps the effect of making them as popular or well esteemed as they might desire to be. It was entirely thrown away on Margaret, however, who neither knew nor cared to know his meaning; and was as obtuse as Ellice was quick at reading people's feeling in their looks and tones. Even her momentary interest in this new cousin, man stranger as he was, was dying out in the absorption of her own passion for Gerrant, and the difficulty of getting at him: a difficulty which the presence of this visitor seemed to enhance doubly and trebly. She sat looking at him with a lowering brow, till suddenly an idea occurred to her which scattered the clouds from it and brought a quick light to her eyes.

"Cousin Gordon," she said abruptly, but in a more pleasant tone than she had hitherto used, "you were out nearly all day with father yesterday. How did you get on with him?"

"Very well, I believe; at least he was very kind to me," said Gordon, smiling and wondering what had brought the sudden brightness to her face.

"He showed you all over the farm, of course? Do you care for that sort of thing?"

"Yes, exceedingly."

"Then you ought to get him to show you Wyatt's Mill at Hardleigh End. It belonged to a Mr. Wyatt;

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but father bought it last year, and there is something wrong about the water-power. He had a man down to look at it, but the stupid didn't understand it. Perhaps, as you're an engineer, you might."

"I could see, at any rate."

"And it is a lovely drive there, only five miles, but one of the prettiest in the neighborhood. There was an old priory once at Hardleigh End, and now some Roman Catholic nuns have built a little convent almost on the ruins about half a mile from the mill. Father will like to show you the place. There is nothing pleases him more than showing his property to people."

"Then I will ask him, and we shall both be pleased. You will come too, won't you?"

"*I?* No!" then softening with an effort the sharpness of her first answer: "The dogcart only holds three, and Ellice must go, of course. She raves about Hardleigh End."

"But if it is only five miles I can walk, and then you could both go."

"Thank you," with less gratitude than irritation, "but I would rather not. I hate show places, and—and I'm not well enough."

"No, I don't think you are; but, in that case, Lisa might like to stay with you. It seems selfish for us to go out pleasuring, and leave you at home."

"Good gracious! do you think you are any *good* to me?" cried Margaret, almost stamping with impatience. "How did I do before either of you came? And there is mother here as well. I—I hate having people always about me." She got up as she spoke, and, still holding the boots partly hidden under her shawl, added more pleasantly: "Then you will ask father; He won't propose it unless you do; but he and Ellice will like nothing better than to go."

"And *you* will like to get rid of us," said Gordon, looking at her full, but good-naturedly. Margaret's eyes fell and her color rose.

"I am not well," she repeated sullenly.

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"No, and you will make your cold worse lingering on these stairs. We will go, Cousin Margaret."

"You will enjoy it I know," she answered, trying to recover herself; "and father is always in a good temper when he has Ellice about him. *She* cares for country things, or pretends to do so. Oh! she has grown a much greater favorite with him than I am."

"That is not true, I am sure; and if it were, I should be very sorry to hear you say it. You ought not to do so even in jest," said Gordon peremptorily.

"But it is true; and what's more, I don't care a bit. Why should I ? I'm rather glad. Yes," checking him as he was about to speak; "I was not at first, perhaps, but I am *now*. You may believe me when I say that. I am glad that they like her, and I am glad that she suits them; and I hope she will stay with them—with us, I mean, for always—but I forgot you! Perhaps you want to take her away soon? Don't just yet. Leave her here while they—while we want her. Promise me you will."

"I!" he repeated, opening his eyes. "Why should I *want* to take her away if I——" but Margaret interrupted him.

"Hush! don't make pretences. Only promise me that and—— Is that a servant coming? Yes! I must go back to my room," and, gathering her shawl round her, she ran swiftly upstairs again, leaving him no time for a reply. Getting up from his chair he went out to the porch and stood on the gravel walk outside thinking. This strange girl was a sort of revelation to him. He had never seen any like her before. True, he had not seen many of any sort, but still even his inexperience of women could not but perceive that she was different from both Ellice and Lyle Devereux, not to speak of the young women with whom he had happened to come in contact in the courts and alleys of Clerkenwell. Her tone in speaking of Ellice struck him as especially peculiar. Could it be, as the letter had once hinted, that she was an object of jealousy

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with this dark, fierce-looking girl; and if so, ought she to be allowed to remain in such a position? Was it she who was in fault, or was it only an unhappy chance and not to be remedied, but by time or her removal! And where else could she go, except to the Devereuxs', at whose household he made mental grimaces viewing it beside what seemed to him the infinitely greater happiness and safety of this? But yet what else was before her, poor little orphan maiden, cast thus early on the wide world! If he were only her brother *de facto*, with right to take her away and protect her himself, that would be best of all, for what an amount of work and usefulness he could find for her among Father Bertram's poor people! Enough to fill her whole life. Why, in sewing for half-naked children alone she might have sufficient occupation for every hour of the day and most of those of the night; and again the regretful thought came to him: "If she was only not so stupidly pretty, but had a hump-back, or a squint!" Things might have been arranged somehow then without offending the laws of propriety, and her housekeeper idea have been carried out after all; but now—— He was so busy this oddly utilitarian and unromantic young man, in meditating on his little cousin and her life here and afterwards, that he never heard her own fresh young voice call to him from an upper window, but went walking on and on, down the garden and the Long Meadow, and so out to the downs, whence he did not return till breakfast was on the table and the whole family assembled for it.

Margaret was among them, and cut short a rebuke she was receiving from her mother for having come down at all when her cold was so bad, by holding out her hand to him and saying, "How do you do, cousin?" as though they had never met before. Another man might have understood it so at least, and acted on the hint; but though Gordon took her hand, he said cheerfully:

"I wasn't *going* to have said good-morning to you,

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as we have seen each other already this morning;" adding, as he turned to Ellice, "Cousin Margaret and I made acquaintance before you were up senorita. The bright morning beguiled us both out of bed, and nearly made me forget the breakfast-time."

"Yes," said Ellice quietly, "I know. I heard your voices."

She did not go on to say that she had been rather hurt at his not hearing hers, and being so much taken up with the morning that he had never given a thought to her, even though she had in fact dressed more hurriedly than usual, on purpose that they might have a comfortable home talk before the family assembled.

"*I* could not have gone off for a long walk by myself, and enjoyed it so much as not even to want him with me, after being parted from him for years, as we have been," she thought with a little sore swelling in her heart, which, as we know, happened to be most utterly unjust; but the feeling soon passed away, as she looked at his plain earnest face and keen blue eyes, all lit up with eagerness, as he leant forward on the table, forgetting his breakfast, while he discussed with the Squire some farming plan which it struck him might be carried out on his father's estancia: something which he had only seen for the first time on the previous day, but which he had already got all clearly mapped out in his mind for utilisation in America; and she asked herself with rather sorrowful humility why she should expect a man, who understood and cared so much for the wide and practical interests of life, to have leisure for dwelling on herself and her probable feelings as if he were only a weak girl as full of fancy and sentiment as his silly little cousin? She was but a child after all, she said to herself, silly and spoilt and ignorant of all those matters which seemed so clear to him; and he had grown into a strong self-reliant man, with a life and interests altogether apart from and independent of hers. Had he not laughed at that cherished dream which had been so real and present with her all these

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years; laughed at, and put it aside as a childish absurdity, even while he told her she was as dear as ever to him? Ah well, she must learn to be grateful and contented with that assurance, and with knowing, as looking into his candid eyes she could not fail to know, that when *he* gave it, it was, with all else he said, not a mere word to soothe and please her, but the plain full truth, neither more nor less.

The little sadness remained however, and was not dissipated even when they were on the way to Hardleigh End. Yet she was very angry with herself for it, and she blamed herself severely for its renewal when she heard Gordon suggesting the excursion to her uncle, and the hour for it being fixed on, as though those two only were going, and there was no thought of her or any one else. It was Mrs Herne who put in:

"There's only room for one o' lasses i' the dogcart; so 'tis well thou art not well enough to go, Maggie love, for in course Ellice must be the one."

. "Aye, aye, Maid Ellice, we munna' leave thee out where Gordon's like to be, eh, lass?" chuckled the Squire; and then as Ellice coloring and faltered, struggling between good sense and a petulant desire to say she would rather stay at home, Gordon turned to her, and put in with some surprise.

"Why, Ellice, wouldn't *you* like it? Cousin Margaret said you were fond of the place. I shouldn't have thought of going otherwise," his manner full of such evident unconsciousness of the reason for her hesitation, that Ellice, heartily ashamed of her folly, hastened to answer in the affirmative, and own that she would like it very much if Margaret did not want her and was not able to go. Many days afterwards she remembered the feverish hurry with which Margaret disclaimed all taste for company or excursions; but now she was only thinking, "What *can* be the matter with me to make me so foolish and touchy? I never was so before. I think it must be that Robin has spoilt me so much."

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CHAPTER XIX

I AM afraid that the same thought came back to Ellice's mind after they had arrived at the old mill, and inspected its beauties. All the way there the Squire and Gordon had talked about labor and emigration, topics on which she, being supposed to know nothing, was allowed to remain silent; but when they reached their destination, and while her guardian was speaking to one of the men, she did get a few words with her cousin, and began eagerly showing him her favorite points in the landscape.

"It was Robin who brought his sister and me here first," she said, "and we had our lunch with us, and eat it down on that great stone by the river. Look, Gordon, how beautifully the steep brown bank beyond slopes upwards on the other side; and how those tall fir-trees stand out against the blue at the top as if they were stretching out their arms with pleasure at having climbed up so high, or wanted to embrace the pretty feathery birch that is bowing to them so gracefully from the other side of the water. Isn't it all lovely? I have always wished you could see it."

"Yes," he said abstractedly, and hardly looking where she pointed. "See here, Lisa, I think I can see where my uncle's difficulty is. He would have to dam up the water there; and draw a line from the angle to the mill-pond here and. . . . As for labor, I know men starving and pining for work; and a job like this if I could get it for them. . . . Stay, there is my uncle; I must go and show it to him." And off he dashed, leaving Ellice standing by the dog-cart, and was soon to be seen walking down by the mill-stream with his uncle, explaining and laying down the law; while the old man seemed to listen, and either differ or agree with as much animation as the younger.

Ellice sat down on the grass and watched them till

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they went out of sight; and then she sat on for a long while—an hour as it seemed to her; but it might not have been so long—till she began to wonder whether they had forgotten her altogether; and her mind wandered back to the last time she had been there. She had been alone with Robin then. They had driven over with a message to the Squire, who was busy over some of the many proposed alterations at the mill; and after delivering it they had wandered down the stream, and sat for a long time by the water looking over a copy of the "Last Tournament," which Robin had just got from London for her. What a hurry *he* had been that day to get the business with his father over, that he might carry her off and show her the book she had wanted. How steadily he had always put her first, even vexing her by neglecting other people in his desire that she should be pleased and attended to. What should she have done without him, she thought, those first months after her arrival in England; and yet all the while she had been pining for a sight of Gordon, holding up his perfections against his cousin's faults, and recking nothing of the happiness in her hand while thinking of that greater yet to come, when Gordon would have been allowed to take orders, and would send for her to be his housekeeper.

Poor silly little girl! She had got her hero now—and he was still a hero to her—and yet she was not happy, though of course she ought to have been. Only a few days back she had been worrying herself lest he should quarrel with his uncle, or offend Margaret, or not like Mrs. Herne; and had made plans (based on her experience of Robin's devotion of not allowing him to concentrate his affection so entirely on her as to be offensive to the others. Now he was here, and all these imaginary troubles had faded into air. His aunt and he had taken to each other at once; his uncle had forgotten his creed, and was as thick with him as if they were old friends;

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he had been frank and friendly with all, even Margaret, and had offended none. Even these very works and schemes which filled his mind were great and useful ones, untainted by any tinge of self: one and all for giving help to the poor, for benefiting his father, or for helping others in some form or another. He *was* perfection, she said to herself, and she ought to be proud and glad of it; and why, why, *why*, did she feel as if a great wave had rolled into her life and swept the sunshine out of it? as if she had been following a star which had suddenly sunk and left her alone in the night?

A man came up to her with a message from the Squire.

He sent his love, and he and Mr. Maxwell were gone to see a gentleman close by, and would she mind waiting for them? They would be as quick as they could; but the master wanted this other gentleman to hear what Mr. Maxwell had to say about the mill-dam.

And Ellice smiled and said, Oh no, she didn't mind: and then, when she was left alone, got up and strolled down to the river's bank, where she and Robin had sat the last time she was there and had read the "Last Tournament," and discussed the people therein represented, and the Idylls generally.

Robin had quoted *Launcelot*, she remembered, and asked her if she could have helped loving that great, if faulty, lord; and she had held up Galahad instead, the "maiden knight," to whom alone was given to look upon the wondrous object of their quest; and when Robin had objected that Galahad was more saint than man, she had answered indignantly that she was sure "her" Gordon would be just such another saint; and that when she wanted to picture Galahad she always thought of Gordon's fair, true face grown into manhood, and with a shining helmet on the candid brow. Robin had grown rather cross at that, and they had quarrelled, and then had made it up again and gone on reading in peace and pleasantness. Ah dear, he

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was gone away now, had parted from her in anger, and perhaps when he came back the barrier between him and Miss Amadrew would be removed, and once engaged to the young lady at the Hall, he would not care to walk and talk with his father's little ward any more. She would be left alone as she was now; nay, more so; for Gordon would be gone back to London, and, Galahad as he was, she fancied now that perhaps after all Launcelot was the better man when it came to dallying in ladies' bowers and whiling away the solitude of lonely maidens.

But even Launcelot left Elaine alone, she thought, as she sat among the ferns and flowering rushes, with the clear brown waters of the brook leaping and flashing among the pebbles at her feet, and the sunlight lying in long golden stripes between the tree trunks on the steep green bank on the further side, "There are some people whom every one is kind to, and who care for kindness very much; but they don't *belong* to any one, and so they must get left alone in the end. I don't think it is at all nice not to belong to any one, not at all nice," thought the little maiden, with a sudden rush of moisture to her eyes which made her turn and hide her small face against the grassy bank, and so deadened her sense of hearing that it was not till a voice beside her said, "Ellice!" a voice which made her start and spring to her feet with flushed cheeks and wondering eyes, that she realised that her solitude had been invaded.

"Robin!" she cried, starting at him almost as if he had been a ghost, "Robin! it *can't* be you?"

Robin was quite as much surprised as she, and even more agitated. She saw that in the first hurried glance, and also that he looked different—paler and thinner than when he went away; and in the recognition of these facts, she forgot the tear-stains on her cheek and the general forlornness of the position in which he had found her.

"You have been ill," she said impetuously, her wet

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eyes taking an unconsciously pitiful look as they met his; "Robin, what has been the matter? Why did you not tell us?"

"What is the matter with *you*, rather?" he asked, stooping his head to look closer into her face, and holding the hands he had taken in a closer and tighter pressure than they had ever felt before, "What brought you here to-day, Ellice? you were crying when I came on you! I never saw you cry but once before. Who has dared to vex or hurt you?"

"No one," she answered, smiling up brightly into the angry anxiety of his eye. (How easy it seemed to smile now! How completely the clouds had rolled away into the land of nowhere! She blushed all over her face at the recollection of the fanciful grief which had brought the tears into her eyes only a moment back.) "No one; and I was not crying—exactly. Do you not know people get a little sad just with thinking sometimes! and the Squire and Gordon had gone on, so I suppose I was rather lonely and . . . . but it was very foolish of me, and you may laugh at me as much as you like, only don't say anything to them about it. You won't, will you?" with a quick timid look into his face.

"I am not likely to have a chance of saying anything to *them*, for I shall be gone before they come back," said Robin with a slightly harsh tone in his voice which was new to Ellice. "I never guessed I should find you here and alone—but I forgot, you did not *come* alone: you are waiting for your—your cousin now. Well, I must be going again. He wouldn't like to have his place occupied, would he? I wish to Heaven, though, you had chosen any other place to meet him in but this," cried the young man with sudden, irrepressible bitterness as he loosed her hands for the first time and made as if he were turning away. Ellice looked at him in utter bewilderment.

"What do you mean?" she said. "Have I vexed you? Indeed if I have I did not mean it."

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"Vexed me! No. How could *you* vex me?" he answered quickly.

"Then what did you mean about going away. You were angry with me when you went away before; and I was very sorry for it; but now that you are come back you are not going again, Robin are you?"

"Yes, and by the next 'up' train. Did you think I should return while—just now?"

"But—but how are you here at all then?" she asked faintly. He was not looking at her, or he would have seen how her face had changed. The clouds were stooping down again and had cast their shadow on her brow.

"I was on my way from Devonshire to Scarborough, and had to wait an hour at Hardleigh station here for the 'up' train; so as I had nothing to do I thought I would run down and have a look at this spot. I was very happy in it once, do you know," he said slowly, "but the last thing I expected was to see you in it again. I could hardly believe it *was* you, and not my own fancy."

"And you are going away again now?" she said. It was the one thing in his speech which seemed to make any impression on her; and she turned away her face, conscious of the disappointed look in it, and not wishing him to see it. I think he must have heard her voice falter though.

"*You* don't want me to stay," he said quickly. "I —I did to amuse you before young Maxwell came; but now he is here——"

"And thanks to you," Ellice put in. "Robin, I know now that it was you who asked the Squire to invite him; and oh! I did think it was so kind of you."

"Kind? Nonsense! Did you believe I could be mean enough to hold my tongue, once I knew what would make you happy?"

"I know you were always good to me," she answered, wondering still at the bitterness in his tone. "I was thinking of it only now; and of what I should have

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done without you when I first came here."

"You were thinking about me!" cried Robin. A sudden light had come into his eyes, a sudden flush to his cheek. "Ellice, have you ever missed me then, even a little? I never thought it possible."

"You must have thought me very ungrateful then."

"Grateful! I know that you are always dreadfully grateful and for nothing. As if it were *that* I wanted! But I'm a fool to talk this way; and especially now when this Maxwell, your cousin——"

"He is your cousin too;" Ellice broke in a little warmly. "Robin, you hurt me. Why do you dislike him so? He has never done you any harm; and you are too liberal to hate a man only because he is a Roman Catholic and going to be a priest."

"*Going to be a priest!*" repeated Robin. His face grew suddenly white; and he put out one hand and laid it on her arm with a grip which hurt the tender white flesh. "A *priest!* Ellice, what do you mean?" he added almost roughly.

"Yes, did I not tell you before? Don't mention it, because he cares so much about it, and his father won't give his consent as yet. It is very good of Gordon to wait and go on working in that engineer's office—don't you think so, Robin? for he has never wanted to be anything else since he was quite a little boy, and——"

"A *priest!*" repeated Robin again. He seemed only able to take in that word; and still kept his hold on her arm. "But then you couldn't—I thought they were all celibates," stammered the young man, "and—and you told me you had promised him."

"And so I had!" said Ellice plaintively. "Always, since I was five years old, we promised that when he was ordained I should go and keep house for him. I have never thought of anything else, never; and now—now," her eyes filling again with big tears, "it seems all altered. He says that was nothing but childishness; and that we musn't think of it, because I am a young lady; and—and not his sister really. But you

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know, Robin he has always been the same as a real brother to me; and I shall grow old soon. One is not young *always*. Oh! I can't help feeling it hard."

"Hard!" echoed Robin; and then before she knew what he was about he let go her arm and flung both his own round her body. "Ellice, Ellice," he cried, "don't you know that I love you? I thought it was quite useless, but now—Oh! my darling, do have pity on me and tell me if it isn't. Don't talk about being housekeeper to a parson when there are men who would give their whole lives to win you for a wife. Can't you, won't you try to care for me? Ellice darling, I care more than all the world for you. Do give me a little hope, and say you'll try to love me, worthless fellow that I am," and so on, and so on, jumbling up prayers and protestations and persuasions in a confused heap, with his bright eyes looking through a dazzled mist of eagerness into hers, and his arms holding her so tightly that she could not have freed herself if she would.

Where was "left alone Elaine," now? The dark cloud had rolled away and swept the forlorn maiden before it. The sun was shining out brightly on tree and flower and green bank and rippling stream, and "casting down a golden crown" upon the fair and dark head so close together. The yellow loose strife nodded its starlike blossoms to the tall bullrush rearing its rough brown head against the breeze. The birds twittered in the branches over head. You could hear the roar of the weir in the distance; and the brown water leapt up, singing a little song of triumph over the moss and weeds and big smooth pebbles in its bed ere it rushed away to fall into the mill-pond beyond; but neither sun, nor stream, nor rushes, nor any human ear heard Ellice's answer; only the heart against which it was spoken, and which took it in and gathered it and her to him in a marvellous content.

There comes a time like this to most people once in their lives; and these two were very young and little

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spoilt by the world as yet. There was nothing to damp their happiness. Once Robin asked:

"Are you *sure* you care about me, love; though I'm not a Galahad and never could be?" but the mute answer of the little head against the shoulder where it rested satisfied him without any words; and after that they were very still for some minutes, and let the birds and the stream keep up their concert unassisted. It was Ellice who spoke at last, and then her voice sounded somewhat smothered and like unto a mouse in a bale of wool.

"You aren't going away again—*now*, Robin?"

"My darling, but I must!" and he started, looking at his watch with anything but a happy face, "and at once too. Good Heavens! I've only ten minutes before the train comes in; and I can't telegraph to put them off again. I've done it once already, and they've to send seven miles to meet me. Yet it *is* so hard to leave you, love; and when I've only just found you."

He took her in his arms again, kissing the small sweet, face passionately. There were tears on it; but she smiled at him when she spoke.

"If you must go, go then, Robin. You won't stay there very long, I know?"

"I was going for three weeks. I shall stay three or four days," he broke in; "and till then, my darling, don't say anything of having seen me to-day. They would want to know what brought me here; and I won't have you teased while I'm away. Keep your goodness to me in your own dear heart; and don't repent it, Ellice, for you have made me so happy. It will only be till Saturday at the furthest. I shall be back then, and will tell my father myself."

"The Squire! I had forgotten him and other people," she said simply. "Robin, ought we not to have waited till we knew if they liked it? Do you think they are *sure* to be pleased?"

"Pleased! of course they will be. Aren't you a

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prime favorite with both the governor and mother? I expect they'll think you only a deal too good for me. *I* do at any rate."

"I don't," she said; "and I don't think they will. But if they are only not vexed—I do love them both, Robin."

"I know they do, my darling, and they love you. Only wait till Saturday and you'll see. I would write to them first; but I'm such a bad hand at letters; and it wouldn't be as pleasant for you. I may write to *you* though, mayn't I?"

"No, please don't. It is not as if you had ever done so, and while they dont know . . . . I had rather you did not," and she said it with a hurried earnestness which was not feigned; for though she blushed very much when Robin told her she must care very little for him if she did not care to hear from him, she would not give way; but only answered with that absence of young lady-like prudery which had always made her so charming in her lover's eyes. "Shall I be likely to care less for you, now that I know that you love me, than when I did not know it, and never heard from you either?"

He had no time to argue the point for three minutes later he was gone, running for his life to the station; and Ellice was sitting on the bank, alone as he had found her, with her flushed face hidden in the hands which still felt hot and crushed from the long, close pressure of his.

Barely an hour had passed, and yet how strange and new a thing life had become to her. How fast the girl's heart beat against the ferns and mosses where her tears had fallen a little while before! It was nearly half-an-hour more before any one disturbed her solitude; but she did not heed it, or even remember that she was not alone. How could she ever be really alone any more? Robin loved her. His first kisses, the first kiss of love that had ever touched her lips, were still burning there, and thrilling her heart through with in-

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nocent, dreamy happiness. When Gordon came trampling in a great hurry through the feathery brake and larch-trees, and calling on her name, she stood up, looking at him with such dazed, uncomprehending eyes that he thought she had been asleep.

"Tired out with waiting for us, I suppose," he said, smiling. "I am sorry, dear child; for it was my fault. Uncle Herne let me go some while back that I might return to you; but I couldn't resist going to look up the little convent cousin Margaret told me of; and once inside the chapel I lingered. You are not vexed, are you? I hope you haven't felt dull."

"Dull! oh no," cried Ellice. It did not even occur to her then *how* dull she had been before "Launcelot rode down to Astolat." "It wouldn't have been you if you hadn't gone to see the chapel instead of running after me. Where else should '*Father*' Gordon be?" she added, laughing, as she put her hand through his arm. She was so happy at that moment that she would have liked to have kissed him; and pitied him woefully, when he said, sighing:

"Ah! I wish I were 'Father Gordon.' Never mind, Lisa *mia*, grumbling never brought a blessing pet; and there is uncle waiting by the dog-cart for us. It is pleasant to have your sympathy at any rate."

"Even though I am only a young lady," said Ellice saucily. Her eyes were radiant with the new love and joy which shone in them; and her feet flew over the ground so swiftly that he had work to keep up with her. Only when she saw the old Squire, and heard the rough peremptoriness of his voice calling to them to make haste, a natural shyness came over her, and she went forward with crimson cheeks and downcast eyes, hardly speaking as he helped her up to her seat at his side.

Fortunately he was too full of the newly-suggested improvements at the mill to heed the timidity of her manner; and Ellice's drive home was as silent as that out. How different to *her* none but her own heart

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knew! All was brightness now; and if her mind wandered from Robin, and the novel happiness which had come into her life, to the conversation of her companions, it was to think with sisterly pride how clever Gordon was, and how well her guardain seemed to appreciate him. Robin too must surely love him when he came to know him. Besides, was he not *her* adopted brother? and anything belonging to her must be dear to Robin now. She had no conception yet of the real nature of young Herne's jealousy of her cousin. Never having dreamt of him in the light of a lover, she did not realise the way in which Robin had taken her out-spoken affection for him; and there had been no time for explanations.

"I suppose if I had a sister he would not like me to be *too* much wrapped up in her," she said to herself with a little conscious smile; while as for Miss Amadrew, that young lady had dropped out of her mind as completely as if she had never existed. It was not till afterwards that she remembered her, and wondered if Robin had ever cared for her, or if it were all mistake of his mother and sister. She almost wished that she had asked him; but the time had been too short, only one hour! How could they have leisure to think of any one but each other in it?

"Why, my maid, ye haven't opened your mouth once all the road," the Squire said as they drew up at the gate; and Ellice looked up at him smiling.

"I was very happy," she said; and it was true, her cup of happiness was so full just then she hardly needed Robin's presence to crown it. Three days were a little while, and then. . . . ! Poor child, she little thought how great a change those three days would bring!

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CHAPTER XX.

"WHERE is Maggie?" said the Squire. It was tea-time, and Ellice, who had run up to her own room for a few minutes' quiet and thankfulness, had just been summoned down by the noisy clangor of the bell. Gordon was there before her, talking to his aunt, and it was the sight of Ellice coming in alone which provoked the Squire's question. Mrs. Herne lifted her round, pleasant face in answer.

"Well, she felt a bit better, father, an' hankered for the air; so I bid her go down to the village an' take Miss Pelter a drop o' cream wi' my love. 'Tisn't often the poor dear soul gets cream; an' I thought 'twould do her stomach good, for she's been rather peakin' o' late. Maggie said 'twas like she'd sit and rest there some time; but she'd ought to be in before now."

"She said she might go on to the Vicarage afterwards, ma'am," put in the maid, who was waiting at table; and Mrs. Herne nodded.

"Aye, aye, then that's it, and they'll have kep' her to tea; but 'twas thoughtless of them too, for she didn't ought to be out after sundown wi' this cold on her. I'm feared 'twill make her worse."

"She ought to ha' known better than to stay," said the Squire gruffly; then, recollecting himself. "Nay, though, our Saxon maids of old weren't wont to sit coddling themselves over a gruel-pot for fear o' colds an' chills, an' our Madge is a brave lass i' that respect an' worthy o' her ancestresses. Howbeit, draw roun', you other two. We wait victuals for no man i' this house; an' whatever Miss Pelter's stomach be like, mine be's a groain' wi' hunger now, an' so mun yours be, an' you would but own it."

"I am hungry. Yes," said Gordon taking up his knife and fork in a way which proved he was in ear-

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nest; "but if Aunt Margaret thinks the evening air too damp for a sick girl, I will take some wraps down to the Vicarage for my cousin, and bring her home after tea. Lisa can go with me." he added with a due regard to the possible impropriety of his walking alone with a young woman who was a comparative stranger to him: an idea, however, which did not trouble the mind of these out-of-the-world south-country folk, who merely thought the young man wanted an excuse for another walk with his sweetheart, for the Squire put in:

"Pooh, pooh! no need for that. The wench looks white an' tired enow already. Aye that 'ee do, little un; an' parson as like as no'll bring Madge roun' for the sake o' having a crack wi' me. 'Tis some days since I've seen the good man; and he's aye some bee in his bonnet to tussle wi'."

"But if she should not have gone on to the Vicarage, uncle, there will be no one to bring her back, and Margaret never thinks of wrapping herself up. Hadn't Gordon better take her big shawl and go anyhow?" Ellice said, and Mrs. Herne acquiescing, it was so decided; Gordon departing after supper laden with wraps for the truant, and with minute directions for finding both the Vicarage and the cottage of the antique virgin Miss Pelter.

Long afterwards Ellice remembered the time that he was away. Fine as the day had been, the evening had turned both damp and chilly, as evenings in September often do: and in fear lest Margaret should have increased her cold, Mrs. Herne had a fire lit in the parlor, which looked almost as bright and comfortable as if it had been winter. They drew their chairs round it and talked the three that were left; or rather, Mrs. Herne talked—her tongue was one of those which ever love to ramble on in a placid little flow of chit-chat—and Ellice answered, sometimes sadly at random, sometimes with more than her usual ready sweetness, as the thought of Robin himself and of

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what had happened that very afternoon, struggled with self-reproach for the momentary neglect of Robin's mother.

Her mother to be—and yet, no!—no one could quite take that place in Ellice's heart; and with the thought came a great yearning wish that her own mother were alive and could come to her, if but for one half-hour, that she might put her arms round her, and, hiding her face on the tender breast, tell her of how Robin said he loved her, and how she could not help loving him too; although she had never thought to do so until he begged it of her with such passionate humility. Mother would have been sure to be pleased and to love Robin, if not for his own sake at first, then for her little daughter's, and for that of the old-school friend to whose care she had confided her. And with this thought Ellice glanced up timidly in the old friend's face, trying to guess what change would come over its pleasant, apple-tinted surface when she heard that her guest, the half-foreign girl sitting there by her fireside, was going to be her daughter—her only son's wife! Would it be unmixed surprise, Ellice wondered; or would pleasure come into it and lighten it with that kindly smile without which it was difficult to fancy the old lady at all. Ellice felt far more sure of her than of the Squire. Indeed, looking at him now, with his broad, red forehead corrugated into a mass of wrinkles, and his underlip protruded as he pondered over a sheet of note-paper covered with figures relating to the proposed alterations at the mill, she felt sundry little nervous thrills beginning to run through her; and making the ends of her fingers so damp and cold that she could hardly go on weaving the delicate tracery of braid and lace stitches which was in process of becoming a cap for Mrs. Herne; while her heart fluttered uncomfortably, and she wished much that Robin had not been obliged to go on to Scarborough; or that he had been in less of a hurry to get an answer from her; or even that she had sufficient resolution to defer their

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engagement till he had spoken to his parents. Yet why, after all, should she doubt them? *He* did not. Had he not told her, "They love you, little one, and will only think you too good for me?" Ellice doubted that last bit still, and took another sly glance at Mrs. Herne, in which the latter surprised her and said smiling:

"A penny for thy thoughts, Ellie lass. What's the matter wi' thee now?"

"The matter! nothing, auntie," stammered Ellice, and then blushed so furiously that the very roots of her flaxen hair were red.

"Aye, what's i' thy head to make thee go peeking up at father an' me, as if thou wert a shy child as had never seen neither on us before; an' were feared to look at us for dread we might do somewhat to thee?" said Mrs. Herne, laughing.

"Mayhap she wants to ask summat of us," put in the Squire, laying down his paper and taking off his big, horn-rimmed spectacles that he might peer into Ellice's crimsoned face under his shaggy eyebrows. "Eh? speak out, Maid Ellice, an' there be; for to my mind (an I say what's in it, as a straight-tongued Saxon yeoman should) there be summat as thee mought ha' told—not to say asked us—wi'out waiting to be prompted."

What could the Squire mean? Did he know what was passing in her heart, and if so, how had he gained the knowledge? Had he seen Robin scudding across the fields and guessed at his errand by her silence and the awkward embarrassment of her manner? or was it possible that the young man's secret had not been so well hidden but that his parents had found it out, and were teasing her to see how far it had gone? The hot color in her face grew deeper and deeper at the thought, so deep that the tears sprang to her eyes.

"Oh! Squire—" she said, and stopped with the glistening drops on her lashes, trying to wink them back. If only Robin were there to speak for her!

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But here to her unutterable gratitude, Mrs. Herne came to the rescue instead.

"Nay, now, father, don't tease her. After all 'twas the men, an' not the girls, that spoke out i' my day, save wi' the lasses, own parents; an' we mustn't forget Ellie is but on a visit like to us. If she were our own child 'twould be another thing."

"You are just as good to me as if I were," said Ellice tremulously. "Dear Aunt Maggie, please don't say anything more to me now. I hate to have a secret from you for an hour; but Robin will tell you that this——"

"Aye, aye, 'tis Robin *has* told us," said the Squire, nodding his head rather grimly. "Thou doesn't keep so close a tongue wi' the lads as wi' us old folk, it seems to me, my maid; but mayhap that's the fashion in foreign parts. Dang un!"

"Sht, sht, father! don't 'ee be huffy," put in Mrs. Herne, always ready to act as peace-maker. "'Twas part my own guess; an' didn't Robin bid us not say a word on't? so don't 'ee scold the lad, Ellie. 'Twas for thy own good he spoke, dearie."

"Seeing as Rob's in Yorkshire, an' like to be there a matter o' foor weeks, 'twon't be easy to scold him," observed the Squire. "Let's see, Maggy woman, when didst hear from him last?"

"Monday; an' I'm lookin' for a letter now," said Mrs. Herne. "I want to know how he is; for he seemed ailin' like when he went away, dear lad."

"An' I want to speak to him about that bill o' Burnby's," said the Squire, while Ellice sat with her hot face turned away and her hands pressed together, wishing that they would talk of anything or any one but Robin and herself. It was so hard to keep silent when she knew perfectly well how he was and when he was returning. "Wife, dost think there's ought in' the tale o' Laura Amadrew?"

"Well, times I ha' thought she cared for the lad an' him for her. Leastways I hoped it once," said Mrs.

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Herne as quietly as if she had not been just protecting Ellice against the Squire's chaff, and with a great want of delicacy, considering the girls presence. "They're a rare old family, and though she's a bit stand-off, her smiles wonderful sweet; and the poor folk do say she's as good as gold."

"Their family ben't nigh as old as our'n," said the Squire angrily. "*Amadrew!* Why, they came in wi' the Normans. A nice thing for an Amadrew to hold himself above the ancient ceorls of the land! I tell thee what, wife, I'd not have lad o' mine go begging in any man's pastures, Saxon or Norman, not if 'twere for a king's daughter, danged if I would . . . . Hey! what's that?"

"'Tis Gordon an' Maggie. I was beginning to think they were wonderful late," said Mrs. Herne, rising; and then her eyes traveled into the semi-darkness of the hall, where Gordon's tall figure was just coming into view, and she added rather sharply:

"Why where's the lass? I don't see her."

Gordon came forward into the light. Ellice had risen too in her relief at the break his coming made in the conversation: but he did not look at her; his face wore an anxious, puzzled expression, and his eyes went straight to the Squire.

"Isn't she here?" he said slowly. "I thought she might have got here before I did, for she wasn't at either house I went to; and I looked out for her all the way back too."

"Wasn't at either! Why, whatever d'ye mean, my lad?" cried the Squire, the more sharply for a reflection of the anxiety in his wife's face making itself felt in his own heart, and being instantly and stubbornly turned out. "Had she left the Vicarage afore you came! Like enough if she did; for 'twas late then."

"No, she hadn't left," said Gordon, "for she hadn't been there at all. I went there first, and Mr. Calthorpe met me at the door and made me come into his study. I told him what I had called for, and he sent

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up to ask his wife if Margaret was with her. He was very cordial, and wanted to interest me in some International Synod for a unification of Christian Churches. He was warm on the subject, and did not let me go for ten or fifteen minutes, but a small child came in to say Margaret had not been to see his mother at all today. Mr. Calthorpe seemed very loth to let me leave then; but I was afraid she might have started from Miss——(your other friend), without me if I didn't."

"As in course she did," broke in the Squire, forgetting Gordon's previous announcement. "A message is a message, my man; an' that parson is al'ays palavering about some rubbish or another——" But Mrs. Herne interrupted him:

"Well, but, Gordon, wasn't she at Miss Pelter's either? Why, wherever could she ha' gone?"

"Not there at any rate. The little servant-maid told me so. Her mistress was ill, and could see nobody. But, aunt, may she not have changed her mind and gone to some other friend?"

"She hasn't any to go to," said Mrs. Herne anxiously. "Dr. Brown has a covered gig; an' if he were 'tending any one this way, an' had to go out o' night, would bring her along an' welcome if she was there; but Maggie can't abide him, nor his wife neither. There's not many people she do take to hereabouts," added the mother simply.

Gordon suggested some sick person among the poor; but was told promptly that Margaret couldn't bear sickness, and never visited among the poor people.

"An' so I don't know where she could ha' gone," added Mrs. Herne helplessly. "An' I wouldn't ha' minded if 'twasn't for her being so poorly, for she's dreadful given to rambling off by herself."

"Well, if she's worse to-morrow she'll get no pity from me," said the Squire closely. "Wife, sit thee down, an' don't go fidgetting like a mandarin doll at a fair wi' the wires loose. There's nout to happen to her at any rate in our own parish, an' belike she's eatin'

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her supper i' the village at this minute. Wenches are never content wi'out they're gadding about, if they're to have a fever for it."

"Perhaps Miss Pelter's maid was out when she called, and so there was no one to answer her knock," said Ellice gently. "If so, and she were tired, she might have gone on to some other house, even Dr. Brown's, where she wouldn't otherwise have thought of calling."

"I'll just turn out again and have another look, if you think it's any use," said Gordon; and though the Squire said, "Pooh, pooh," in his gruffest manner, and asked if his wife thought men's legs were given them for nothing else than to run after her daughter, the grateful smile in Mrs. Herne's face decided her nephew, and he went out accordingly, leaving the other three as they had been before.

There was no talk of Robin, or teasing of Ellice this time. The Squire was thoroughly put out, and went on scolding and grumbling at Margaret's absence till the incident which, considering the girl's erratic habits, would otherwise have attracted little notice, grew into a serious thing, and filled both the other women with a sensation of trouble and uneasiness which made them half unconsciously count the minutes of Gordon's absence, and brought fresh rebukes on them from the master of the house for the distraction occasioned by listening for Gordon's return, and starting at imaginary footsteps.

"I'll stop this galivanting by herself; see if I don't, my lass," said the Squire, his face becoming more inflamed with wrath than before, when, after an interminable time as it seemed to his companions, the click of the garden-gate was heard at last; but Mrs. Herne stopped him, with lifted hand, and eyes that were brighter than usual with uneasiness.

"Hush! I only hear the one. Oh, father, 'tis the boy back alone. What can be keeping her?"

He came in the next moment, looked round the room questioningly for Margaret, and shook his head.

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"I did not meet anyone on the road," he said, sitting down rather heavily as though tired; "and I passed the doctor's house. A little boy pointed it out to me; and the parlor window-curtains were not drawn. I could see him and a woman, his wife I suppose sitting at the table over their work. There was no one with them."

"Nor no one supposed there would be," said the Squire irritably. "Did'n the wife tell thee as our lass can't abide them? 'Tis a way wi' my son an' daughter to turn up their noses at their father's friends. What time is't, Maggy woman? Half-past nine—nigh ten o'clock! Then why ben't the servant wenches gone to their beds. an' the house shut up? I'll stay here for yoong madam, an' do serving-man to let her in when she's minded to come whoam. 'Twill be long ere she'll go gadding out this way again, I warrant her."

"Oh, father, don't 'ee be so angered wi' her, don't 'ee, dearie," pleaded poor Mrs. Herne, with tears in her motherly eyes. "Maybe she was kep'. There's a lot o' people were haven't thought on: but it's no good guessing at 'em till she comes. I can't be feared anything's happened to her, because she told me she was only going to the village; an' there's the cream she took. Gordon, you forgot to ask Miss Pelter's girl about *that?*"

"The cream is in her room," said Ellice, who had run upstairs and returned while the others were speaking. "I looked in and saw the little can standing on her table. She must have forgotten it."

"Wi'out she changed her mind about going to the village,' said Mrs Herne doubtfully. "'Twas the last thing I said to her, 'Give my love to Theresa Pelter, an' tell her I hope it'll be soothing to her inside, poor soul!' And where else *could* she ha' gone!"

Considering the lonely situation of Croft and the wide range of Margaret's usual rambles, this opinion took up too wide a field of conjecture for answer; and they

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all sat silent and expectant for some minutes; Mrs. Herne's mind beginning to run on tramps and gipsies, though as yet it still inclined to the idea that the girl had been "kep' to tea somewhere; and Ellice, silent but full of nervous terrors partly induced by throat-cutting and lancing reminiscences of South American life, partly by Margaret's general strangeness, and the repressed excitement about Robin, which was beginning to show in her pale face and feverish eyes.

The Squire had departed to go round the farmyard, according to his usual practice before shutting up for the night; and Gordon seeing that no more was needed of him, and that neither of the women were inclined to converse on general subjects, had taken a book from his pocket, and was already deep in it. After all, he knew too little of his relations as yet to take a keen interest in their ways and doings. It was certainly wrong and imprudent for a young woman to stay out so late without permission; but talk and surmises would not bring her back. If she had been properly trained in a convent school she would never have done such naughty things, of course; but benighted people who let their daughters grow up anyhow could not be surprised at any way in which they might behave. With a man's innate dislike to fuss, he fixed his mind closely on his book to avoid hearing Mrs. Herne's incoherent murmurs; and as time passed and the Squire came in and began a course of sharp and snubbing answers to his wife's stream of wonder and conjecture, it almost irritated Ellice to see how closely her cousin's head bent over the page in evident unconsciousness of all around and about him.

Eleven o'clock struck, and the Squire stood up.

"Go to bed, all o' you," he said harshly. I'll ha' no more o' this; an' I be goin' myself. If she comes why she may knock till one on us wakes; but I'll ha' no house o' mine turned upside down this length. Dost hear, wife? Go to bed."

But instead of obeying, Mrs. Herne burst into tears.

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"I'm sure some'at's happened to her," she sobbed. "She'd ne'er ha' stayed out this way otherwise. An oh, father, don't 'ee mind what tales we hear o' tramps? An' there was that painter fellow as got into Giles Jannin's house, an' that Miss Pelter saw followin' a girl she took for Maggie; that man at Mitcham——Why, Ellie, what's the matter?" For at that moment Ellice, who had risen at the Squire's bidding, started and turned round so suddenly that she knocked a small box off the table with a crash. Her face was crimson when they looked at her.

"My maid," said the Squire, his shaggy brows drawn together in an ominous line. "There's some'at i' thy mind as had better out. I've noted thou hast been rare an' fidgety the whole evening; an' now that mother speaks o' that scamp thy face is as red as if there were that to tell as thou wast ashamed of. Out wi' it, whate'er it is."

'But I have not. There is nothing," cried Ellice, much distressed at the accusation and at the looks turned on her. "At least—" her color changing again —"nothing that I *know*."

"Nor aught that ye guess?" put in the Squire sternly. "Maid Ellice, I tell'ee there's some'at in your mind connectin' that blackguard wi' our Madge being out so late. Say it out this minute; an' don't go lookin' at your cousin. We dont want no Jesuitry here."

"And what cause have you to suspect any, sir?" said Gordon, flushing up haughtily; but Ellice came between, her candid little face lifted to the Squire as she laid one little hand on Gordon's sleeve for peace.

"Guardian, please don't! I will tell you all I know. We met him once, and he spoke to us, not impertinently; he thought we had dropped something; but he stared at Margaret very hard, and I did not like his manner. I never thought about him again till the day Miss Pelter told us that story, and then. . . . but that

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is all I know," breaking of suddenly with another deep blush, and a quick shame of her own suspicions as the thought of the slight ground on which they rested, and of how treacherous Margaret would think her, rushed upon her mind. The confusion in her face, however was too transparent; and the Squire lost all control of himself and burst into such a storm of angry questioning and accusations of double dealing that Gordon came to the rescue.

"You are excited, sir," he said, laying one strong hand on Ellice's shoulder so as to draw her to his side, "or you would not speak to my little cousin in that way. She has told you all she *knows*, and you have no right to ask anything more from her. Suspicions are not facts."

"Suspicions! An' o' whom pray, yoong man?" cried the Squire, glad to find some one else on whom to expend his wrath while Mrs. Herne began to cry, repeating helplessly: "Do 'ee tell us what 'ee think, Ellice; do 'ee dearie."

"Dost know thou'rt speaking o' *my* daughter, the daughter o' an honest Saxon? Wife, hold thy prate. 'Suspicions,' indeed, an o' our Marg'ret! Ellice, my maid, I wonder thou'rt not shamed to hint at what thou dursn't say. Speak it out, lass, an' make no more about it; or this house is no place for thee."

"Yes, I think you had better, dear,' said Gordon quietly, and with his arm still round her. "Margaret will explain it all for herself; but I think she will hardly be angry with you for speaking now."

And so adjured Ellice told all she knew: the man's voice she had heard speaking to Margaret outside the orchard that afternoon, the letter posted to some "Gerrant, Esq.,"at Mitcham, and the letter which she had given to Margaret. It was little enough, after all; but perhaps her unwillingness to say it, and the interruptions and interjections of the Squire, made it seem more. How thankful she was for the silent support of Gordon's arm she could not have said; for as it was,

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her guardian hardly waited for her to finish before bursting into a tempest of rage which only those who knew him very well could have told was but the cover for the anxiety he was feeling on Margaret's account.

It was all—Ellice's fault, not that he believed a word of it; but it was her fault all the same. *His* girl meet a man an' then lie about it! And if so, why hadn't Ellice spoke out then? 'Thought she might have been dreaming, and Margaret *looked* at her! Both couldn't be true; an' how dared she take letters in secret from the post-office an' give them in secret to his daughter? Margaret had never dreamt of such underhand doings before, never would have dreamt of them if she hadn't been put up to it; and as to Ellice pretending she didn't know what was in the letter, or any more about it, why he didn't put any faith in her. When a girl came to them, an' was treated by him an' his as though she were one o' the family, an' pretended to treat them as if she *were* o' the family, keeping everything to herself all the while, and carrying on her own love-making on the sly, instead of trusting in them as trusted her, like enough his own poor lass would suffer from seeing such ways, and want to do the same . . . . Not that he believed a word of the whole story, though mind you, not a word.

"Ellice, what does he mean by love-making?" said Gordon quietly. He had felt the little figure tremble against his arm, and seen the quick, painful flush which answered to *that* cut. She turned quickly to him, hiding her head against his shoulder.

"Gordon, indeed I did not mean to hide it; or be sly. I did not know they guessed; and it was only this afternoon——"

"*What* was only this afternoon?" he asked with a surprise which savored of sternness, and moving slightly, very slightly, but it was enough to make her lift her face. "Lisa, what do you mean?" but before Ellice could answer, the Squire, indignant at this double duplicity as it seemed to him, broke in:

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"Nephew Maxwell, art not ashmed to go on wi' this make-believe? If thee hast any love for the wench, thee'd better not show it by teaching her thy foreign trickeries where there be no cause for them, but——"

"Sir, I am teaching Ellice Devereux no trickeries, foreign or otherwise," said Gordon sharply; "and you have no right to insult me by saying so. Ellice knows that I love her. There is no make-believe in that; and if you consider——"

"Ah, Gordon dearie, don't 'ee be so quick to answer him back," sobbed Mrs. Herne. "He only meant she might have telled us. We took so kindly to her, you see, and goodness knows we wish nought but good to both o' you . . . . But, father, if she says 'twas only settled this afternoon?"

"Settled this afternoon!" sneered the Squire. "What, when Robin told us——"

"But I did not know he had. He said he would do so, and that you would be pleased. I am sorry I said anything to him if you are not; but indeed it was only to-day—at the mill," cried poor little Ellice weeping now so uncontrollably that Gordon drew her to him again with the old brotherly tenderness which had so bound her heart to him of yore, and which made her cling to him now as to a rock of refuge. Oh! how good it was to have him, her brother, there! What should she have done without him! but Mrs. Herne interrupted her pitiful pleading with a nervous impatience which showed the anxiety in her mother's heart.

"Oh! father, let her alone. What do it matter now—about *them*, an' it past twelve o'clock an' our own child not come in! Hush! Lord ha' mercy! what's that?"

A knock at the door; not a double knock but a single, heavy bang striking on their ears like a thunderclap. Gordon was nearest, and letting Ellice go, sprang and opened it before anyone else could move. The moon was shining brightly outside, and its white rays fell across the threshold and on the figure, *not* of

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Margaret, but of a lad about sixteen, covered with half-dried mud, and holding a piece of folded paper in his hand.

CHAPTER XXI.

GERRANT was going away, and the rooms which he occupied at No. 5, High Street, Mitcham, were in that state of confusion which lodgings generally present when their occupant is leaving, and more when that occupant is an artist. The door was open between the two apartments, and the bed, table, chairs and floor were strewn with every variety of litter that it is possible for the mind of man to conceive in the shape of clothes, newspapers, unfinished canvasses, empty bottles, railway novels, tubes of oil-paint, and brushes, all mixed up together in most heterogeneous confusion.

He had one of the canvasses in his hand at the present moment, holding it at a little distance from him so as to get a good light on it before placing it with sundry others in a packing-case which stood in the middle of the *débris* of straw and litter before him; and was regarding it with an eye whose criticalness was softened by some little tenderness and more than a little regret. His coat was off, he had a short pipe in his mouth, and his dark hair was rumpled over his forehead and decorated with more than one fragment of flue and straw; but nevertheless, with the sun shining through the white curtains of his little window parlor on big, muscular limbs, his sunburnt face and tangled curls, he looked both handsome and picturesque; and the pictured face on which he was looking was handsome too, wonderfully handsome, with eyes that seemed to burn into his as he gazed down into them.

"I shall never get a model like her," he muttered at last. "Never! That's as like her as it can be. I've idealised of course, but the eyes are exact; and I have learnt how to make them look like that whenever I

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pleased. I don't believe I shall ever meet such another anywhere, if there is one to be met. And to have to cut the hanged place and leave her in the middle d— it all! it's too bad. Why—wasn't she a gipsy really?"

There was a knock at the parlor door, and he turned round impatiently, laying the canvass on the table as Kitty the maid looked in her face a little smuttier than usual, and the door-handle held in the skirt of her gown to preserve it from a grimy paw which appeared to have been digging in the coal-hole for the last twenty-four hours.

"Please, sir, 'tis a lady askin' for yer."

"A *lady!* What the deuce can—who is she?"

"Her as coom to yer afore, please, sir," said Kitty, looking not at him but over her shoulder. "An' here a be, please, sir," with which she moved aside, giving place to Margaret Herne, whose tall head was already towering above the little maid-of-all-work's frowsy topknot, and who came in rapidly, shutting the door behind her with a curtness and want of ceremony which was not soothing to Kitty's sensitive feelings. She marched downstairs in a huff, and relieved herself of some of it in comments on Margaret's visits to her mistress's lodger which were not complimentary to to the young lady in question.

Little, however, did Margaret heed or think of the remarks she excited? She had walked five miles, and her dress and feet were white with dust, her face white too, but for a scarlet spot on either cheek her lips dry and cracked with fever and fatigue? and with a wild look in her eyes which Gerrant had never seen in them before; and which made him instinctively draw back as he stammered out her name.

"*Margaret!* You here! What has brought you!"

"*You,*" she answered, and then she came quickly up to him, laying her two hands on his shoulders and looking up in his face. "Nino, I came because——" she was half choking and broke off passionately.

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"How could you—oh! how could you write that to me! Did you think I would bear it?"

"Bear what? What did I write to you? Margaret, my dearest don't be so excited," he faltered, half embarrassed by what he knew of her meaning, and half puzzled as to its fulness. The pressure on his shoulders deepened as she looked up into his face in an agony of impatience.

"About saying good-bye to me and—and going away. Nino, you are not going away. You would not do so!"

"But I am, I must. Nay, listen to me, child," with some imperiousness; for her face frightened him. "I am obliged to go. I have been sent for; and there is no putting it off" (it was a lie of course; but that was nothing, the object was to quiet her.) "Do you think I would *want* to leave you, Fire-queen?" and tempted by the nearness of her face he stooped his and kissed her. The color rushed into it then, but she did not shrink, only came a little nearer and said:

"But for how long? It will not be for long?"

"By Heaven, it wouldn't be at all if I could help it?" She looked wonderfully handsome to him just then with that yearning, feverish light in her eyes, and his resolution wavered. "Next summer I shall try to manage a——"

"*Next Summer!*" The words came almost like a cry, interrupting what he was going to say. "Nino, what do you mean? Do you think I can do without you a whole year I thought you said that you loved me!"

"And so I do. Deuce take it all! I wish I didn't, for both our sakes," cried Gerrant with more heartiness than he usually used. He did care terribly for her at times; and this was one of them. The prospect of parting had softened him, and he bent down to her tenderly. "Do you doubt me, Margaret? I thought you had been juster."

"Then, if you love me, stay with me. Don't go

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away. Nino, listen to me; if you go I shall die or kill myself. I would rather die than be as I was before—without you. Do you know what you are to me? All yesterday I was in bed. I had caught cold the night before and could hardly move or swallow, I was in such pain; and yet I was happy—happier than I ever was in my whole life, because you loved me, only because of that. And then your letter came; and—I thought I should go mad. I took a double dose of the doctor's medicine, and something to make me sleep as well. I would have taken any poison in this world that would have given me strength for the moment; for you said you were going away; and I—if I had dropped down dead an hour afterwards I should not have cared, so that I could have got to you and seen you first."

"Do you care for me as much as that, then, or is it only fancy, Fire-queen? I'm afraid so, and that you don't really mean it," said Gerrant coaxingly. The passionate nature of the girl almost frightened him, and forced him to a more soothing tone that was his wont. He did not yet understand the woman with whom he had to deal.

"I mean every word, and more, much more; but it is all here somehow, and I can't say it," she answered, taking her hands from his shoulders to press them on her breast. "When I woke this morning it was dawn, and I felt better. Nino, I thanked God . . . . I never remember thanking God for that sort of thing before, but it was that I might get to you. I sprang out of bed at once, never even thinking of what they would say if I was not in for breakfast. I was so afraid you would be gone it swallowed up everything else; and I dressed, took my boots in my hand that I might walk softly, and went downstairs. *He* was standing in the doorway and stopped me, for I knew directly I saw him that it was no use."

"He! Who? Not your father?" asked Gerrant;

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then relieved by her start and shiver at the idea: "You don't mean the jesuit'?"

"Yes, her lover. I had not seen him before, I was too ill; but he knew who I was at once, and told me so. There was a look in his eyes as if he knew where I was going too. I felt that if I had gone on he would have followed me, and I could not have prevented him. He is not like what I thought he was."

"In what way?" said Gerrant, laughing. "Do you mean he had not a palpable tail, or that his horns did not stick ? out of his hair? *Ma belle*, I told you you had more imagination than you give yourself credit for."

Margaret shook her head impatiently.

"No, it was not that; but he looks you in the eyes—so!—through and through. I felt afraid."

"My, dear, when girls have such glorious eyes as you, men will look into them, as I do! don't I?" and he drew her closer to him, gazing boldly and admiringly into her dark face. The blood rushed up into it again; but she met his gaze unwaveringly.

"No, not in the same way. Your eyes say to me that you think me handsome, and like me for it. When you look at me so, I feel as if you were holding out your hands to me, and I must go, but he is different, his eyes are and they seem not to look at the outside of you at all, but as if they saw all that you were thinking, and—were sorry somehow."

"The devil! You seem to have looked into them enough," said Gerrant jealously. "Margaret, are you going to get flirting with this fellow when I am gone?"

"No, and you are not going; not yet awhile," she said quickly. "Nino, you don't think I am going back alone, do you?"

"Well, my dearest, I don't like to think it, because I'm afraid you'll get into trouble; but I fear there's no remedy, unless I were to carry you off with me. Would you come, Margaret?"

"Yes, if there was no other way." She answered

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with a cool readiness, which surprised as much as it delighted him. He lost his head in the moment.

"You would! By Jove, what a dear, brave girl you are! How could I ever think it was possible to leave you? Fire-queen, say that again, you *will* come with me. By Heaven, you shall never repent it if you do."

He had folded her in his arms, but she loosened herself from them, looking up at him with that sort of half-awakened puzzle in her deep eyes which Gerrant had first found so irresistible in its temptation.

"But you don't understand me. Why should I go with you now when there are other ways? I know father dislikes you. I know he ordered you off his premises, but that was because he did not guess, he thought you were after Giles Jannin's wife. If you go back with me now I will take your hand and say to him, 'Father, he loves *me*, and I love him, and I am going to marry and belong to him, no matter what any one says.' He will be very angry at first, and will say a lot of harsh things I don't doubt; but when he sees that I don't care, and that if he turned you out-of-doors I would go too, he will give in; and then, Nino, then you can stay in the house and paint me as much as you like, till——"

"Till I carried you off legally," said Gerrant thoughtfully. Margaret's devotion did not exactly touch him, but her impetuosity carried him away. It was not easy to tell her that he had never had any intention of marrying her, or of making her a proposal; that the latter (if there had been one) had come from herself, in answer to the love-making which had become so much a matter of course with him that he hardly dreamt of its being taken seriously. It was no use reflecting that not only was he without the means of keeping a wife, without curtailing his private expenses to a much greater degree than he had any idea of, but that there were certain complications in his life—more than one, perhaps—which, if brought to light, as fathers and brothers might make a point of

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doing, would go far to thwart his marriage with any respectable girl. Margaret was still looking at him, and the passion and fervor of her love carried him so away that for the first time he began to ask himself if it were not possible after all to reward her by an honest affection, and make her his wife. There were objections, certainly; but how could he think of them with her brilliant eyes fixed on his, and her supple feverish hands fixed on his? Besides, if she were an only daughter and her father were rich, why should he not be won over to make them an allowance which——

"Margaret," he said suddenly, "are you sure you don't mistake your own power? Squire Herne would never listen to me. I am only a poor painter, with barely enough to keep myself, and he a landed proprietor and a wealthy man . . . ."

"But father isn't wealthy," Margaret broke in with an eagerness meant to be reassuring. "And as to being 'Squire,' some don't call him even that. We *are* nothing but farmers, you know, for all Robin likes to talk grandly, and to snub me for saying so; and as to money, it is true the Croft is ours, but it is all father can do to make it pay itself, and Robin would never have gone to college if an old aunt had not left him some money when she died to enable him to do so. Why, Nino," getting more earnest as she saw her lover's face change, and fancied he was still doubting her, "mother has to be as economical as possible, and we never go away anywhere, not even to the seaside for a month as other people do; and as to me, I haven't got a penny of my own, and never shall have; and I would rather go to you and scrub floors and clean pots for you, than stay here and marry the richest man in Downshire." And Margaret looked up cheerfully, thinking, in her ignorance of the world, that she had made matters all smooth and easy now. Had she been clever at reading faces, the expressions on her lover's might have altered her opinion, but he shook it off in a moment with a short, hard laugh. in which all

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the evil nature of the man seemed to be condensed. After all it was better as it was, better to punish the old man's insolence by wringing his heart than go to him cap in hand for a favor which might cost more in the end than it was worth. Tightening his grasp of her hand he looked down at her with a smile, which even to her dull perceptions had something of a brutal look.

"Ah, Margaret, it makes no difference. The less money you have the more your father will want with your husband; and besides, I am not going to ask you of him. He insulted me grossly, and I'll truckle to no man living who has ever done that. No, by Heaven! not even for you, my queen. If you come with me you must come now, do you understand? from your own choice and mine, or not at all. You consented just now, Margaret. Did you mean it; or were you only playing with me?"

"Does my being here now look as if I were playing?" she answered almost sternly, and with a look of reproach which shamed his temper, and brought him to her feet in a fit of repentant admiration.

"My beautiful gipsy girl! no. It is because you are so different from all the rest of your calculating, cowardly sex, so far above and superior to their miserable prudence and pettiness, that I take you at your word, and ask you now to show your own frankness and generosity by trusting me. Come with me, Margaret. You are not happy here, but I can make you so. You hate this narrow, soddening, rustic life, but I will show you another, the life I have so often told you of, but which will seem a thousand times gayer, brighter, and more varied when you are at my side to share it with me. I am poor, I know, but not so poor that *you* need ever want. Nay, that you need ever wear a dress like that again," touching her dusty black gown contemptuously. "Margaret, how do you think one of ruby velvet would look against your dark skin, and gold bangles on——"

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"Hush!" she had laid her hand on his mouth with a sudden, fierce gesture, so that he was compelled to stop. "Do you think if I would not come to you for yourself alone, I would do so for the new life and the fine clothes you could give me! But I *can't* leave them this way without even a word. Nino, won't you go back with me, at least, and ask them? You know that there is nothing that I would not do for you."

He jerked back his head with an impatient gesture.

"Nothing you would not do, *except* the thing you said you would! A true woman that, all over! But I have answered you already. I can't and won't meet your father, and what is more, I must go by the next train. If you care for your life and your friends here more than for me," and he moved a little away from her with an air of affected indifference which cut Margaret to the soul, "stay with them. I don't want to force you to go, any more than I forced you to come here to-day. Choose for yourself, Fire-queen, but choose quickly. If you prefer people who care so little for you as to have put a pasty-faced Yankee girl in your place, say so; but if not, if you *love* me, Margaret," turning suddenly and stretching out his hands to her, "love me as I love you, stay and trust me. Love, which is it to be?"

"You." Even he would hardly hear the word, but it was the whisper of intense, concentrated feeling, not timidity; and he did not need it to know that he had won the day. For some moments Margaret could not have said more if she would. Her lips were sealed.

Gerrant had his preparations for departure nearly made, and it did not take him long to complete them. Indeed, he made her assist him, talking to her the whole while so as not to give her a moment for thought. Still the smallest natural incident will often touch some chord in the brain so as to wake a strain hitherto dumb, and the sudden disappearing of a long bar of level golden light from the room made Margaret start up

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from the floor, where she had been kneeling to cord an easel and exclaim.

"Nino, the sun is going to set. It is tea-time at home. They will have missed me already."

"Well, my queen," he said, smiling, "they don't know where to find you; and if they did, we shall be gone long before they could get here. Don't be afraid my bird is safe."

"But if they find out and come after us to London! Nino, they might—before we could be married."

"Very possible," he answered with a rather peculiar smile; "but we aren't going to London. These boxes may; but you and I and my big portmanteau will change at Farnoholm for Southampton. You shall wake in France to-morrow, Marguerite."

She drew a long, excited breath, and her face lighted. It was the demon of *ennui*, the fever for change and adventure which had been preying on this girl's veins for years, and which, under all the power of her mad and misdirected love, made the lurid glimmer of its wings visible now. But even on the brink of hell, God, the All-pitiful, often sends His angels to hold back, though it be but for one second, a desperate soul from its final plunge into the bottomless pit; and the light died out of her eyes, her lips quivered, and something like a look of shame passed over her face.

"What will they think of me when they find I am gone? Nino, may I not write them a line now to say I went with you, and why I could not ask them, and that I will write again when I am married? They will get it to-morrow at least."

"Certainly not," he said roughly. "Do you think the village gossips will cackle any the less for what you could say or write? It is too late for you now to think about them."

"I was thinking of father and mother and Robin; not of gossips," said Margaret sorrowfully.

"And I am thinking of you," said Gerrant, laying his hand on her shoulder, while he tried to turn her

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eyes from their wistful outward gaze to his. "Fire-queen, which should you think of most, me or them? Which cares most for you?"

It was the voice of her evil angel wrestling with that white-robed one which still hovered at her side; and how could she resist it? The sun had set, but the sky was full of a lurid crimson glow which flooded the little village street and streamed in upon the girl standing there with head uncovered, save for its masses of raven hair twisted into a heavy coil on the nape of her neck, and bent slightly forward, the lips parted, the dusky face flushed with a fever the brow furrowed with the inward struggle which showed itself in the heaving breast and twisting and untwisting of the slender brown fingers knotted together in a nervous clasp, the heavy cloak falling back from the rounded curves of her tall, girlish figure; and Gerrant stooping over her, a muscular Apollo in his knickerbocker suit and white shirt-sleeves, the red light bronzing his short clustering curls and tinging as with blood the hand resting on her shoulder; but leaving in shadow, dark as the man's own soul, on the handsome, wicked face so near her own, and lips now whispering in her ear. A little bare room, with grey walls, a path of red light, and these two figures standing in the centre of it. Without, a ruddy evening sky with a band of swallows flying homeward across the saffron glow; and a single purple clematis blossom swaying in the breeze outside the latticed pane; not much perhaps in words, but a picture more powerful in form and coloring, more terrible in meaning, more tragic in suggestiveness than Nino Gerrant, clever artist as he was, would ever paint.

"It is getting late. They will have suspected something," said Margaret.

"It is getting late, we must be gone," said Gerrant. "Margaret, if you love me, you most obey me now; if not, you are still free——"

She turned her head quickly. The pure red light

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died out of it, and was swallowed up in the dark shadow of his. The restless hands closed on his arm as if to anchor themselves on the strength that had subdued her.

"I am not free. I am yours. Did I not say so? Try me if you doubt it."

"I don't; but I must try you all the same. Bid me good-bye now, and go to the station by yourself; not through the village, but across the fields, the way I took you once before; and don't show yourself at the station, but wait under those sheds near by till I come for you. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Good-bye, Nino." She put out her hand as submissively as if she had been a child; but he took it and her in his arms and kissed her twice passionately before he let her go; then, opening the door, said loud enough for Kitty and her mistress to hear if they pleased:

"Good-bye, Miss Roberts, I'm sorry the picture could not be finished before I leave; but I will send it to you from London in the course of a week."

And then he went back into the room, shut the door, and, standing in the shadow of the window-curtains, watched the girl's tall figure cross the street and turn off, without wavering or hesitation, in the direction he had indicated.

"So that's done," he muttered to himself "She'll not turn back now; and, after all, she is wise. Once find out her visit here to-day, and her character would be gone quite as utterly as by any going with me, and I wonder if they're the sort of people to make a fuss. By Jove she's a glorious girl though, and worth fighting for. Not but what *she'd* stick to me without any fighting on my part. I know her well enough for that."

Aye, he had gauged her character and knew that much of it to the bottom; a knowledge of all others the most dangerous to him who possesses or her who is the subject of it. God in His fatherly mercy pro-

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tect the woman who has given that power over her into the hands of any man, unless he be purer and nobler than—who shall say what percentage? let man decide—of the men of this generation are given to be!

CHAPTER XXII.

MEANWHILE Robin was far away in the north, utterly ignorant of everything that was passing in the home where he had never been so much needed, and enjoying himself with all the buoyancy of a young man who has just been accepted by the girl he loves; and who knows that the three short days which must pass before he is again in her presence, will only sweeten the subsequent meeting, and give him another opportunity of reading the flush of joy and pleasure on the little face so dear to him in its tenderness and transparency.

"I am the luckiest fellow in the whole world, the very luckiest fellow," he said to himself more than once in the train. "Dear little thing, how sweet she looked, standing there under the arch of trees in her little black frock, and with those two pretty spots of color in her cheeks! That's the only thing she ever wants to make her regularly lovely, a little color. Not but what" (correcting himself with the instinctive loyalty of love) "she's prettier without it than nineteen out of twenty girls that I ever met. I used to think Laura Amadrew good-looking—and so she is, of course—but after all, that cold, queenly style of beauty can't hold a candle to my darling's snowdrop face. God bless her! And to think that she loves me and is going to belong to me after I had given up all hope of her and thought she was bound hand and foot to that cousin fellow! Good heavens! what an insane, jealous fool I must have been to fall into such a mistake! Why, I might have lost her by it; and he going to be a parson,

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after all. Deuced good thing by the way that those parsons aren't allowed to marry; and highly sensible of him to see he couldn't install quite such a sweet little girl as his housekeeper with Mrs. Grundy and Mr. Whalley kicking up a shine. Upon my soul I shall never laugh at special providences after to-day. The only bore is having to go down to this beast of a place. I could have got it over with the governor, and had her all to myself this evening, if things had been different."

But "bore" as it might be, it could not take the radiance out of the young fellow's face, or the answering sunshine from his heart; and more than once he caught himself smiling involuntarily at a stout and jolly-looking couple with two tall, plump, rosy-faced daughters, laden with baskets of ferns and bunches of wild-flowers, and evidently on their return from their summer holiday; while he wondered with a sort of reproachful surprise at the haggard, woe-begone expression of a woman seated exactly opposite to himself in the corner of the carriage, and who, to judge by her face, had not so much as thought of holidays and happiness for many a weary day. The jolly family got out when they had passed half-a-dozen stations, and he was sorry for it, and bestirred himself in assisting fat mamma on to the platform and handing out numberless shawls, books and baskets after the party, for which attentions he received sundry, hearty thanks from the father, and more smiles and blushes from the pretty daughters, as they held out their hands for the scattered *impedimenta* he was collecting for them. But the unhappy-looking woman remained, and by-and-by he found his gaze wandering more and more from the panorama of green fields and hills and hedges which were rapidly flying past them to the mournful face opposite to him, and wondering what trouble could have graven such deep lines in her face; or whether any trouble in such a happy world as this would be sufficient to stamp out every sign of youth and comeli-

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ness as utterly as had been done in the case before him. For she was not old, this woman, nor more than thirty perhaps, though the lines on her brow might have doubled that, and left some to spare, if you had judged by them; and once she must have been pretty —almost beautiful indeed—to judge by the modeling of the brow and chin, the large, deep-blue eyes with their long lashes, and the delicate curve of the lips; consumption had, however, laid its deadly hand upon her. The eyes were hollow and framed in brown circles, the cheeks had fallen in, the cheekbones stood out sharp and prominent while the mouth had a drawn, blue look, and the whole complexion—even the redundancy of light-brown hair—had faded to a dull greyish tint, which enhanced the mournful, corpse-like appearance of her whole *physique*. Once or twice Robin fancied he saw the glimmer of tears in her eyes; but she never looked at him or spoke; and at last, with a sort of impatient desire to rouse her, he broke the silence himself. Did she like the window open, or was it too much for her?

"No, thank you; I like the air," she said, and her voice was sweeter than he had expected from the sombre gloom of her visage. He hazarded another observation.

A monotonous country this they were passing through. Did she know when the train would get to York?

"No."

Perhaps she was not going so far?

"Yes."

He was going farther yet beyond Scarborough, to stay with friends. Awfully jolly place Scarborough in the summer time. Had she ever been there?

"No."

She never looked at him after the first question. Her eyes had fallen on to a broken bit of fern left on the seat by one of the rosy-faced girls; and they remained there, as though she were too languid or too little in-

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terested in him to lift them again. Robin was getting discouraged, and began to think of giving up trying to enliven his mournful fellow-passenger as a bad job, when they stopped for a minute or two at a small country station, where a gipsy girl came to the window of their carriage offering little fancy straw baskets for sale. She was a wonderfully pretty little creature with the peculiar beauty of her class in berry-brown cheeks and saucy black eyes; and Robin bought one of the baskets, saying with a laugh as they went on their way:

"I'm sure I don't know what to do with it; but she'd got such awfully pretty eyes one couldn't refuse, and I don't suppose she sells many of them. What a famous model for a painter she'd make! I should think it would be a more paying profession for her."

"God save her from it and its pay, then!" said his companion, with a sudden bitter energy which made Robin start and look at her.

"Why?" he asked wonderingly.

A light had come into her eyes, and a hectic spot to either thin cheek; her hands, clenched themselves tightly on her knee as she answered in the same tone:

"She has done you no harm. Don't wish her the worst that could befall any woman."

"Is it so bad a trade then?" said Robin gently.

He was beginning to think his strange companion mad; but natural chivalry and the thought of Ellice would have made him tender to any woman just then.

"Bad!" she repeated. "Better starve and be in hell now than go to it by *that* road."

"Is it necessary to go there at all?" said Robin. He was sure she was mad now; but a poor consumptive woman could have no danger for a strong young fellow like himself; and she interested him by her very contrast to the innocent face he had kissed for the first time only a couple of hours back. "I hope many don't."

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"The Bible and most of your parsons say many do," retorted the woman. "It doesn't much matter though."

"By Jove, doesn't it!" cried Robin. "I should think it did, if I believed in it." The fact was he did not at that moment. How could a man living in the same world as such a little angel as Ellice, feeling the soft clasp of her hand in his, and knowing that she loved him, realise the existence of any such ghastly after-place? His companion looked at him sorrowfully.

"I believe in it," she said. "I wish I did not. There would be no justice, without it; but I don't want justice, I never did . . . . except *from* him; not on him—oh no; God knows I never asked for that." She said the last words more as if she were speaking to herself, and so low that Robin could hardly catch them; and he thinking the topic an unpleasant one, and too exciting for her brain, busied himself in unfolding a newspaper instead of making any reply. It was pleasanter to lean back and, under cover of the page, let his thoughts wander to Ellice, to the next meeting, and how happy they would be in the future, than to be discussing hell and justice with a madwoman. She had closed her eyes, and did not speak again till more than an hour had elapsed when she suddenly said, very quickly, and without any of the excitement she had lately manifested:

"I beg your pardon, but you were speaking of artists a little while ago. You are not one yourself, are you?

"Not at all," said Robin, smiling; "never even handled a brush in my life."

"But perhaps you care about pictures? You go to the Academy. Have you ever noticed any by—by Gerrant, Nino Gerrant?"

"Gerrant? No; that's a foreign name, isn't it? I don't think I ever heard of him. Is he a well-known man?"

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She hesitated, the hectic color coming into her face in a bright glow.

"Not——very, I think. He ought to be, for he paints beautifully sometimes. But there was a small picture of his in this year's Academy. I wonder you did not see it: a woman half unclothed and playing with a tame leopardess, their shadows mingled together on the sunny pavement in front, a wreath of deadly nightshade twining round a pillar to the right."

"A strange subject! but I missed it; for I was not in town at all this summer. Is the artist a friend of yours?"

It was only an idle question; but it drove the color out of her face in a moment, leaving it so ghastly pale that for an instant he thought she was going to faint.

"A friend?" she repeated huskily. "Oh no; but I. . . I knew him once. His real name is not Gerrant. I thought you might perhaps know, and could tell me where he is now?"

"Not I." said Robin. "The only artist I know at all is Frith, and him very slightly. I hate his pictures too; so that I never know what to say to him. Fancy calling a thing like that 'Railway-station' a *picture* at all! How this age which has produced men like Ruskin and Poynter and Albert Moore, can tolerate—— Hallo! is this York?"

It was York; and as they forged up to the crowded, noisy platform Robin had to break off his dissertation and open the carriage-door for his companion, who was already rising to her feet. She thanked him with a little bow, and a murmur which might have been anything, and stepping down, walked swiftly away, not looking to the right or left; but like a woman used to the place, and not expecting to find any one to meet her. In another moment she had passed out of sight.

The rest of Robin's journey was very monotonous, and the last ten minutes were chiefly occupied in wondering how he should explain to the friends to whom he was going that after being engaged to them for a

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three weeks visit he was only going to remain three days; and that, too, when he had already twice postponed his coming. It had seemed easy enough while he was with Ellice. Men in love are apt to be slightly oblivious of the *convenances*, more especially as regarding their duties to every other member of society but the one being who for the time absorbs their thoughts. But Robin was sufficiently a young man of the world to know that though one or two mutual friends may have sufficient sympathy for love in them to be indulgent to this quasi-selfishness, the generality of acquaintances are not to be put aside and taken up again at pleasure; and these were people he did not at all care to offend. The difficulty threw a shade of constraint over his meeting with the eldest son of the house, a college chum of his own, who had driven over to Scarborough to meet him, and take him on to his journey's end; and while they repaired to the Railway Hotel in order to get some refreshment before starting, he almost regretted that he had not told Ellice a week instead of three days. It would be very horrid to be so long away from her: not even hearing from her, too; but how could he have the face to tell the Scott-Gardiners that he had come all that way to them, and given them the trouble of keeping his room ready for him, and sending to meet him, only to go off again almost immediately? And here was his friend rowing him for having put off his arrival for so long, and descanting on the shooting-hut on a friend's estate to which they were going on the morrow, for three or four days' sport and of all the multifarious engagements to follow.

"There's a capital rink at Scarborough here, and the girls are mad about rinking," said young Scott-Gardiner, who was a brisk, lively fellow, and rattled on so fast that Robin had plenty of time to cogitate the dreadful question of how to say "But after all your plans I am not going to stay with you beyond Saturday."

"Why *didn't* I tell my darling a week!" he repeated

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to himself; and yet the idea of writing to put off his return seemed too disagreeable for entertaining. He had been a good deal spoilt and "made of," in the course of his three and twenty years, and had fancied himself in love more than once already; but at his age men are seldom so *blase* with women and their fascinations as to be insensible to the pride and pleasure of a pure heart won: nor was he of that amiable order of young cubs who take such winning for as much a matter of course as the beauty, sweetness or goodness of the girl to whom the heart belongs—things well enough in their way, *i. e.* for flinging beneath their own loyal feet; but by no means to be appreciated at any value of their own, or repaid by any of that foolish reverence, gratitude or worship, which older and wiser men, who have bought their experience in the bitter waters of life, and strained it through the measure of the world's iniquity, will pay with lavish hand and loving heart to anything so rare and good as the love of a gentle, pure-hearted woman. Withal he was an honorable young fellow and knew that every day he delayed his return was not only a robbery to himself of Ellice's society, but that it was compelling her to maintain a reserve which was neither fair to her nor his family, and which he knew was one of those things which the girl's sensitive nature would feel most keenly. All of a sudden a bright idea flashed upon his mind like a ray of sunlight, and while his friend was giving some orders to a waiter about their meal he rushed into the coffee-room seized pen and paper, and scrawled these lines to his sister.

"DEAR MADGE, *PRIVATE.*

I want particularly to come home on Saturday and can't find an excuse. Telegraph to me that I am urgently wanted at home. I'll tell you why when I come, and don't say anything to the governor——" then after a moment's hesitation he added—"Love to mother and—Ellice, from Yours affectionately,

ROBIN."

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One name in the note was blotted before it was placed in the envelope. Perhaps it looked something like its owner; for the young man writing it stooped his head and touched it with his lips. Ah! well, men in love have done yet more foolish things before now; and women have not thought the worse of them for it.

Robin felt ever so much better and jollier when his note was safely in the pillar-box, and positively enjoyed the seven miles' drive to Meresham Hall, being able to join in his friend's fun and talk, and to respond to the welcome he received from the other members of the family with all the greater heartiness for not having to make that horrible speech which had so weighed upon his mind.

"I don't wonder at Tom's liking him. He's such a bright young fellow, and up to anything," Miss Scott-Gardiner said to her sister at retiring that night; and the impression on the rest of the party was the same. How little Robin guessed that, while he was laughing, talking, and singing duets with one of the girls of the house his own sister, the only one he had, was even then far on her way from the home she was leaving—leaving without tear or sigh—to cast herself upon the shallow faith of a man of whom she knew nothing but that he belonged to a profession which her father held in cordial abhorrence, and that he admired her personal beauty as he did that of any model striking enough to make his pictures sell!

Very early on the following morning, young Herne with his friend and another man staying in the house, departed for the somewhat distant moor where their shooting was situated; and thus when a couple of hours later a telegram arrived at Meresham Hall addressed to "Robin Herne, Esq.," that young gentleman was not there to receive it. Mrs. Scott-Gardiner and her daughters were also out, having gone into Scarborough to spend the day, and thus it remained with a lot of other letters on the hall-table till night-time when they returned.

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"A telegram for Mr. Herne? Nothing unpleasant I hope. When did it come?" said the good lady; and being told between ten and eleven in the morning, she added: "Dear me, how unfortunate he should have left before. Do you think we had better open it, Carrie, and telegraph on contents? It may be something important."

"Or nothing at all. Some people telegraph for such trifles," said Carrie. "Anyhow it is too late to telegraph to-night. I think we had better forward it with the rest of the letters. They will reach them by the first post to-morrow. His people at home are all well, at any rate. He told us so."

And accordingly the telegram, with two letters for young Scott-Gardiner, were put in an envelope and sent to the village post-office without delay.

Perhaps it did not make much difference after all; neither telegram nor letters would have found the young men in, they having started with their guns after a six o'clock breakfast, and not returned till evening, when very muddy, tired and hungry, they tramped in just in time for a seven o'clock dinner. They had lunched and rested on the moor in the middle of the day, but had got over a good deal of ground since then, and burnt a good deal of powder, so Tom Gardiner did not even open the envelope which was addressed to him till after dinner and a cigar; and then the first thing he exclaimed was:

"A telegram, and for you, Herne! Why, what the deuce possessed the women to put it up with my letters? I hope it's nothing important."

I'm afraid Robin colored. Of course he never doubted for one moment that it was in answer to his note; and inwardly thought Margaret had been rather more prompt than was necessary. She need not have sent it till the following day, at all events; but after all, it was good of the old girl to be in such a hurry to obey him; and he tore it open hastily, wondering how she had worded it.

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"Return home at once; you are urgently wanted there. Do not lose a train after getting this."

These were the words he read below the superscription at which, by the way, he never dreamt of pausing to look, and something like a smile would have quivered on his lips if he had not just recollected himself in time and substituted for it a look of anxious gravity, as handing the pink paper to his friend, he said:

"I say, Tom, this looks ugly. What do you make of it? (By Jove, she's put it strongly enough! I didn't mean her to go it quite so imperatively)," he added to himself with another barely choked down laugh at his little plot. Scott-Gardiner read it with a look of most unfeigned vexation.

"'*Return home at once.*' It does look as if something serious was amiss. Is one of them ill, do you think? But surely it would have said?"

"They were all well when I left," said Robin hypocritically; "but—but it *is* urgent, isn't it? I suppose I must go."

"It's the beastliest bore imaginable, but I'm afraid you must. That '*don't lose a train*' looks as if it were something important. You didn't come from home, did you?"

"No," said Robin, coloring a little; "I've been in Devonshire lately; but I heard they were all right the day I came down here."

"Who is it from, if I may ask? and don't they give any reasons for sending for you?" asked Mallam, the other young man.

"No, none. It's from my sister," said Robin.

"None. It's from his mother," said Scott-Gardiner in the same breath; and then two young men looked at each other.

"*Mrs.* Herne," repeated the host, laying his finger on the word he emphasized; "and that proves she's all right all events. Did you take it for 'Miss?'"

"Yes, let me see," said Robin. In his heart he

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merely set it down as a mistake of the telegraph clerk; but it was better that it should seem to come from his mother; and he read it over again aloud.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said then; "but I don't see that one can neglect that sort of thing."

"Certainly not," said Mallan. "Perhaps your governor's been sold up, or the house burnt down, or some of your little peccadilloes—now, Herne don't blush!—turned up awkwardly.' I'd have been in a deuced wax, though, if any one had sent *me* a telegram without saying what was wrong; and anyhow he can't go to-night, Tom."

"No.," said the latter, "there's no train from the Horwich station after eight. There's one to-morrow morning at 6.30, if you can catch it, and I'll order the dogcart to be ready to drive you over. I suppose you had better go by that."

Robin made a wry face. After a long, hard day's shooting over bog and heath he did not feel in the best mood for getting up at dawn, swallowing a hasty breakfast (if indeed he got any at all), and racing off to catch the first train for Scarborough, when all the while he knew perfectly well that there was no need for any such proceeding at all: and that he might have gone a couple of hours later, or waited till the day after with equal convenience.

It was his own fault, however, and though more than half inclined to burst out laughing at his own expense, he knew that as things had gone so far he must keep up the joke to the end, and answered with due gravity:

"Thanks, old fellow, I think I had better."

"You'll have time for breakfast at Scarborough if you're in too great a hurry here." said Mallam, who was a young man who liked to be certain about his meals, "for you've to wait three quarters of an hour there for the 8: 15 to York."

"And again at Waterloo unless you can do the road between King's Cross and there devilish quick" added Scott-Gardiner who was consulting the time table; and it

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seemed to Robin as though the other two were seeing through his hoax and "piling up the agony" for his discomfiture.

"When do I reach London?" he asked, mentally execrating the unwonted hurry Madge had been in; and being told 3.20, made a mental resolution to dine and sleep in London and go down to Downshire by the next morning's train.

"I shall be so fagged otherwise, I shan't have go in me to resist the governor if he cuts up disagreeably about Maid Ellice," he said to himself, using the title his father generally gave to the little dansel in question, and which seemed to Robin peculiarly appropriate to her. "I wonder if she is happy now at knowing that I am coming back so soon, and have gone to all this trouble and given up my shooting and everything for her sake. Well, she's worth it a million times over. God bless her! and I'd do it a million times for one look at her face. What a fool I was to leave her at all?"

He was in very good spirits for the rest of the evening, and joined freely in the other's conversation; so animatedly indeed that Scott-Gardiner wondered if he was really indifferent to his family or only talking fast to cover his excitement.

"You'll let us know if you find bad news waiting for you," he said at bidding his friend good-bye. "I'm awfully sorry we should have to lose you," and Robin grew red all over and could hardly find more than a mumble in reply, he felt such a humbug for all the solicitude his self-created telegram had excited.

It is a long journey from Scarborough to Downshire, and he carried out his intention of breaking it in London by going to the Oxford and Cambridge Club to look over the papers and dine, and afterwards to the theatre; not that he thought there was likely to be anything worth seeing at the dead season of the year, but because every one he knew was out of town and and he wanted something to amuse him till he could see Ellice; but the play, more deadly stupid than he

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had imagined, palled on him, and the longing for the fair little face of his future wife (*his wife!* he said the word over again softly and lingeringly) grew so strong that at the end of the first act he got up and went out. He could think about her more easily in the streets, semi-deserted now, and in the cool evening air than amid the glare and babble of the theatre. It was almost dark; but the lamps were all alight, and there was a young moon which rising over the houses touched and kissed to silver the fountains in Trafalgar Square, and laid a crisp white finger on the broad pavement encircling that handsomest of all our spaces. He stood there a moment or two gazing from the National Gallery with its heavily-pillared portico and massive flight of steps all white and shining in the moonlight, to where Northumberland House still stood dark and grim, a monument of grand old times gone by for which no "city improvements" or views of the the Embankment can ever make up with its stubborn lion standing out with head erect and stiffened tail black as though cut out of ebony against the melodious green-blues of the twilight sky; but though he looked, he saw and thought of nothing but Ellice. Her image seemed to prevade everything, nay, to be beside him, gazing at him with gently reproachful eyes for having dallied on his journey home when, by putting his comfort a little on one side, and making up his mind to risk a slight amount of chaff, from his family for his hasty return, he might have been with her even then; and so impressed was his brain and heart with the longing for her, that for the moment he almost thought he *saw* her! A face like hers it must have been, for as it flashed upon him for a moment from a passing cab he fancied for one quick breath that it was she, and made a hasty dash forward; and then as the retreating vehicle passed out of the circle of gaslight which had illumined the countenance of its occupant, stopped short, and laughed himself at his own folly. Certainly he must be awfully in love

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to go about dreaming like this, and fancying he saw Ellice in everything; and after all, now he came to think of it, the face even in that fleeting glimpse had not been quite like hers, but paler and older, with dark sorrowful eyes gazing not at him, but out with a wistful vacancy into the night.

He went back to his club read till bed-time and dreamt of Ellice till the sun woke him in the morning.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I HAVE heard people speak of mistaking death for sleep, and of deluding themselves, for a few happy moments at all events, that one already fled from them forever and ever into the vast, unknown void of eternity is but resting in that life-giving slumber, without which our life here would be a burden exceeding in torture any yet invented of man; but surely there is *something* in the rigid lineaments of that mask of wax from which the soul has departed, something in the first glance at that eternal immobility of lip and eye and limb which must say at once, even to those experienced in the dread signs of death—"The house is empty. He whom you came to seek is gone away;" and you know it, even though you go to the bed and take the rigid fingers in yours, and kiss the clay-cold lips with passionate kisses, and try by a thousand caressing words, a flood of tender adjurations, to make-believe to your own heart that this—*thing* which lies before you still holds the soul of him who has already risen and gone away. And so it is with the shadow of a great trouble. The happiness has gone from a place, and we feel it even as we enter at the door. There is a nameless something in the look of the once cheerful rooms, a droop in the garden flowers which used to bloom so bright and sweet. which tells us that the life of gaiety has departed. Something has fled which we

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came to seek, and we know it even before we realise what it is, and are saddened by it without being aware of our own foreknowledge.

Somewhat of this Robin felt as walking across the country from the station he came in sight of Hernecroft between ten and eleven in the morning. He had risen early, breakfasted in haste, and left London by the first available train, amusing himself all the journey down by wondering where he should first see Ellice, and whether he should have the good fortune to do so without any lookers on. Would she be expecting him, and have gone to the Long Meadow to watch for his coming? or would she be in the garden, weeding and clipping among the flowers? or seated at the parlor window with her head bent over one of those wonderful pieces of embroidery, in and out of which her nimble needle used to fly with such marvellous rapidity, and which he had so often hindered by snatching from her and hanging on the bough of a tree, or the cornice of a high book-case, partly from the sheer delight of teasing, and partly that he might compel her to coax and pray for its restitution? He devoutly hoped that it might be fine weather at the Croft, so that his father might have gone to the fields, and (if it pleased God) taken that once hateful cousin with him, and that Mrs. Herne would be busy in the kitchen, and Margaret—somewhere. Lovers are intensely selfish where the loved one is not concerned, and for the moment Robin would have been glad if his whole family could have been locked up in a cellar underground, if so he he might thus get Ellice to himself for a minute, and be able to take her in his arms and make her tell him that she was glad to have him back.

But though the day was fine, and the sun shining brightly on the grey stone walls of the old homestead as he approached it, his buoyant spirits began somehow to decline with every nearing step. There was certainly no slender figure leaning over the gate of the Long Meadow; but after all, that he had hardly expec-

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ted it. Ellice was a shy maiden in some respects, and might not choose to come to meet her newly-accepted lover as a girl openly and longer engaged might have done as a matter of course. And there was no black gown visible among the roses and syringa-bushes in the garden, where indeed the leaves had begun to flutter down, and were lying, yellow and untidy-looking, on the lawn where her low cane-chair had been wont to be placed in the hot, still days of summer. The dining-room window and the hall door were both standing wide open, but there was no one in the hall, or even in the windows above, though Margaret, at least, having sent off the telegram, must have been on the watch for him. Could anything *really* have happened? Could Ellice be ill? It was the most groundless of notions, for how often had he come home from an excursion or college and seen no one till he walked in upon them; but all the same, the step grew slower as he came up the gravel walk, and his heart sank down with such a leaden weight, that it was a relief when, at the sound of his foot on the threshold, the servant girl came running from the back premises and uttered an exclamation of pleasure at the sight of him.

"Mr. Robin! Eh, zur, 'tis well to see thee back. Us has been lookin' an' lookin' out fur thee this long while."

"Why, did you expect me?" said Robin. He had not wished Margaret to make his message public; but it was just like her stupidity, he said irritably to himself, any other girl would have taken his hint and said nothing. The servant stared.

"Aye, zur; did the telegraph no reach thee? Missus telled us as her had sent thee one."

"Yes I got a telegram . . . ." He could not understand the girl at all, she looked so scared and untidy; and *where* were the rest of the family? But before he could ask a question or add anything further, other feet came hurrying down the staircase, and his mother threw her arms round his neck.

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She was not crying, but at the first sight of her he knew something terrible had happened, and a great sickness came over his heart as he held her closely to him, which took away his powers of speech, and made her sobbing gasps for breath worse than the worst of news.

"Robin! Robin!" she said at last. "Oh, my boy, God be thanked you've come at last! Eh, but I've been hearkenin' an' hearkenin' for you till every sound that i' my ears seemed like the step o' you. Did you not get my telegram, love, that ye were so long o' coming?"

"*Your* telegram?" repeated Robin a hot flush coming over his face as he thought of the half day and night wasted in London. "I got one, but I thought it was from Madge. I wrote to her—did she not tell you? Mother! mother dear, what's the matter?" for at the mention of her daughter's name Mrs. Herne broke out into such bitter, terrible crying as in all her life the placid little woman had never given way to before; and which shook her plump frame from head to foot. Inexpressibly shocked and alarmed, Robin half-led, half-carried her into the parlor, and holding her in his arms, tried by every coaxing word to soothe and calm her, asking again and again what had happened. At last it came out.

"Maggie! Oh, Rob boy, Maggie, your sister—she's run away, gone off i' the night wi' a strange man! Eh, think to it! our own child, the only girl we ever had, an' her father so proud o' her, scarce thinkin' a man i' the boundaries good eno' for her. Oh! Maggie, Maggie! what could ha's got thee to disgrace us so!"

"*Margaret run away!*" repeated Robin. He was so utterly startled and taken aback that all thoughts of Ellice, or the reason for his return, had fled from him. He could hardly grasp the meaning of the words he repeated; but he kept his arms round his mother, pressing her head against his breast, and she clung to him sobbing with such piteous sobs, as would have

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required a hard man indeed, let alone a son, to hear unmoved.

"Aye, Robbie, run away an left us—left us to shame herself an' us wi'out so much as a kiss from the mother who bore her, aye, and suckled her for eleven months longer than she did for thee, sonny, though folks said as 'twas a folly, for she cut her teeth soon, strong teeth too, an' I've got the marks o' them in me now. Eh, Lord! what be they, though, to them we'll carry to the grave from her arter this! But she was a stubborn babe then, an' cut them hard, poor wean! an' I couldna' bear to put her from me an' she wail, wailin' all the night. Ah, but many's time the master has walked the floor a good hour o' nights wi' the poor girlie in his arms when I've been tired out hushin' her. Thee'd not think it o' thy father now, Robbie man, would thee? but eh, there'a none, save his wife, could ever know right down to the bottom o' the tender heart o' him. *She* couldn't ha' known, or she'd never ha' left him for a painter fellow as she could scarce ha' spoke wi' half-a-dozen times; and' now I doubt me she'll never see him again, wi'out thee can bring her back to us, Robin. Oh, my boy! why didn't 'ee start directly the telegraph? Nephew Gordon took it for me himself the first the i' the morning o' Thursday."

"Thursday! But I never got it till Friday evening," cried Robin. "I was away with young Gardiner on a shooting party, and they forwarded it like a letter. If only it had reached me on Thursday I should have known it came from you, for I had only written to Margaret the night before, and there wouldn't have been time for her . . . . But, mother, I don't understand yet. Try and be calm, there's a dear old mammy, do try. *I'm* with you now at least, and there's Ellice too" (he could not help coloring as he said it), "to love and cheer you; I'll go and bring back Margaret even if she's married ten times over, to ask your pardon: see if I don't! But you must tell me more

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first. I can do nothing until you do. Try and tell me, mammy, for *her* sake."

And thus soothed and adjured, Mrs. Herne told him all that had happened, from what we know already till after the arrival of the boy with the folded paper, which turned out to be a letter, scrawled in pencil, from Margaret. It had been given him, he said, by a tall young woman at a distant railway-station, where he had been doing a job for his uncle, a carpenter. He was just finishing up, and his uncle was telling him the nearest way to walk to Merehatch, where he had an order for a larger job on the morrow, when this young woman, who seemed to have been listening to him, came up and asked if he would care to earn a shilling by leaving a note at Hernecroft farm, which was on the direct road to Merehatch, for her. Of course he said he'd be only too glad; and his uncle lent her a pencil and a bit of paper, and she wrote it on a large packing-case, which he thought belonged to her. She had only a few minutes, for the up-train was signaled just then, and a gent, her husband he supposed, came up and hurried her into it. The packing-case was put in the luggage-van, and the train went on. The young woman had hardly time to give him the money and letter before she got into the carriage, her companion was hurrying her so; and she seemed not to wish the latter to see what she was doing. The boy hardly saw her face either; for she had a black veil tied over her hat; but she spoke very hoarse, as if she had a bad cold. And he'd have got to the Croft before, but he lost his way and tumbled into a bog, where he might have stuck all night, only a man heard him shout, came to the rescue, and gave him a dry and some supper in his cottage before letting him go on his journey.

"And what station was it, mother?" said Robin, his face very pale and grave now that he realized, more completely than before, how hopelessly lost to them Margaret must be by this time.

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"Maxley-Burrows, the next station to Mitcham," said Mrs. Herne weeping; "an' 'twas the London train they were waiting for; but for all that nephew Gordon don't think they went to London, but changed at the Junction for Southampton; an' if so they must ha' meant to go abroad. He telegraphed that from town."

"Oh, he went up to town, did he?" cried Robin, relieved at the thought of having an assistant already in the field; though ready to curse himself for the delay on his part. "And my father? did *he* go to Southampton? Mother dear, don't cry so. I must ask you about it, that I may know what to do; and what made Maxwell think they were not in London?"

"None o' the guards or porters at Waterloo had seen a couple answering to Gordon's description of them," said Mrs. Herne; "an' two did get out at the Junction and change for Southampton. He found *that* out: but——Oh, Robbie lad, I've not told thee the worst yet; an' I don't know how I'm to do it, nor bear up under it either."

"Worse *yet*, mother," repeated Robin incredulously. It did not seem to him as if there could be anything worse than his sister leaving her home at, night, and in such a way, unless——Where *was* Ellice, by the way?

"What do you mean? Nothing more about—Margaret?" he said. Somehow *her* name would not come.

But Mrs. Herne shook her head, into which the grey seemed to have come all of a sudden, like an autumn frost, making her look like an old woman, instead of the comely, cheery dame who had always seemed almost too young to be her son's mother.

"Nay, nay not her, but your father. Oh! Robbie love, he's had a stroke, an' he's lyin' there on his bed now, not able to move; an' God only knows if he ever will again: he that was so strong. Eh! but the Lord has laid a heavy load on me this day; not that I'd fret

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by one word, He knows, if 'twas only me to bear it; but for *him* to be knocked down, the master! Robin, I'm glad thee hast come at last to help us."

"A *stroke!*" said Robin. He spoke almost in a whisper, holding his mother tighter than ever in his strong young arms. In very truth this second shock coming on the top of the first seemed too terrible to be true. "When? How did it come on?"

"Just arter reading her letter. He couldna' credit it of her at first; and then he stood up and spoke out terrible like. It was too much for him, poor father! an' he didn't know nor mean one half o' what he said. No man is 'countable at times, you know, if he *be* over harsh; but Ellice, the silly lass, got frightened, an' Gordon up, an' was just going to answer him, when father flung out both his han's, as though to grab him an' fell crashing forward. I was wel'ly touching him myself; but he went so heavy; I couldn't stop him; an' he'd have struck his head again the doorpost only Gordon caught him an' laid him on the floor. He's wonderful strong is that lad, he carried your father upstairs arterwards, wi' only one o' the girls to help him; but we all thought he were dead. Aye, till arter the doctor came we did; an' he can't move now, nor speak save in a mumble like, as I doubt you'd not understand. He's sleepin' now, or was when I came down; but he's been mortal anxious for you, Robbie boy."

"Poor father! if I could only have come sooner!" said Robin remorsefully. "Let me go to him, mother; and I had better see Margaret's letter, so as to be able to tell him what I think. I suppose Ellice is with him now?"

"Ellice?—Oh no," said Mrs. Herne with some embarrassment. "She's not here at all. She's gone on a visit to her aunt, Mrs. Devereux. It was better, for we couldn't do wi' guests just now," she added sadly.

"Gone on a visit—*now!* Mother, are you joking?" Robin's face paling even more than it had done already. Were these horrible surprises never to cease?

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He drew back from his mother, grasping her hand instead, and so tightly as almost to hurt her. "You don't mean that she—Ellice—isn't here?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Herne simply. "Gordon went up to town, but came back for her yesterday. It was the luckiest chance that Mrs. Devereux had written, asking her. Father's seemed quieter like ever since she left. He thinks our poor girl'll come back to us now."

"But why? I thought he was fond of Ellice——that you all were! Do you mean that she was *sent* away, or that she wanted to go? What has Margaret's coming back to do with her?" cried the young man, letting go his hold of his mother, and pacing to and fro the room in uncontrollable agitation. Mrs. Herne looked after him piteously.

"I'm feared we made too much o' her, Robbie; an' Maggie felt it. Poor child, she was aye a bit jealous; an' Ellice had taken ways wi' her, wonderful taking ways: leastways they took wi' me, an' I own it; but how could I tell she would deceive us so?"

"Deceive you!" repeated Robin sternly. He thought she was alluding to Ellice's love for himself; and he stopped short in his walk, the color flushing to his cheek. "Ellice would never have deceived a lamb, or tried to do so. She could not. What do you mean, mother?"

"Why, it turned out she knew o' Maggie's meetin' wi' this painter fellow, an' took letters between them on the sly. She owned to that hersel', when the master pressed her," said Mrs. Herne, with the quietness of one who believes (as was indeed the case with her) that she was speaking the simple truth and nothing more. "Father thinks she was minded to get Maggie out o' the way that she might go on wi' her own love affair more smooth like: but, dear heart! why need she to ha' hid it up at all, when none here were minded to go again' her--wi'out, indeed, brother Harry didn't wish it, for all she said he did. Father told her so right out; and——but, eh! what do all that matter

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when 'tis our own child is in question, an' we not knowin' where she is. Come upstairs to him, Robbie. Come upstairs; he'll be wakin' an' lookin' for me."

"Wait one moment, mother," said Robin hoarsely. That all this should have happened about his father and Margaret was terrible enough, too terrible indeed for words; but that Ellice—*his* Ellice—should be mixed up in it, and in the way described, was something different, something even worse in his eyes just then. He could not let it rest so. "If you think Ellice is in love with her cousin you are quite mistaken. I know I once thought so myself and I told you of my belief; but I was wrong, quite wrong. She——"

"She denied it, I suppose?" put in Mrs. Herne quickly. "Lor, dearie, so girls will: 'tis their way; an' yet when the master spoke to her about him, an' said as we couldn't ask him here wi'out brother Harry approved of her marrying him, she told us yes, he did; an' were like a mad girl for glee till he arrived. Maggie hersel'—ah! my child, my child, where art thou now? —said she never saw a girl so much in love; an' 'twas true; but I doubt she showed it too plain to him, or he was colder by natur'. Anyhow, I do believe they'd a tiff the very day he came, for he took himself off wi' the Squire nigh all the afternoon; an' she stayed i' the parlor here an' cried. Her eyes were quite red when I found her; and they weren't a bit what I call warm to each other when he came back. However, I asked no question; for I said to myself, if the lass don't tell me nought o' her own free will, 'tis not me will press her; an' I suppose they made it up at Hardleigh mill next day; for that evening they was as loving as you like; an' when the master blamed her she up an' clung to Gordon like as if she'd been his wife already, an' he spoke up for her the same. They couldn't be no more hiding it then, though she did say as they'd only settled it that afternoon; and the Devereuxs, can do as they like about it for——"

"Mother, I am *sure* you are mistaken," cried Robin

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passionately. His heart was full of bitter pain and confusion. and his voice sounded as if he were choking. Mrs. Herne lifted her hand a little impatiently.

"Maybe, maybe, Robbie. Mothers al'lays are; but never mind now. 'Tis nought to me or thee; though I'm right enough for all that seeing I was here an' saw and heard 'em. God knows I don't want to blame her or wish her ought but well; but 'tis your father an' Maggie. my own poor, lost girl, I must think on now: an' don't delay me wi' aught else, lovey; for my heart do feel to be breakin' for want o' knowin' what has come to her an'—Hush! Wasn't that Susan callin'? He's awake. Come to him, Robbie; come!"

And without pausing for a moment, she turned and hurried upstairs. With one long breath Robin followed her. The world—his world—seemed turned upside down with him; but she was right, his father and sister were his first duty now, and his first interest. He must attend to them, and them only; and not to any one else at present. There would be time enough to think of his own feelings afterwards.

It was well that this was in his mind before he entered his parent's room or he might have felt a sudden and bitter reproach in the sight of the darkened apartment and of the silent and motionless figure, which had been a hale and hearty man three days back, stretched out, rigid and helpless as any log upon the bed. As it was, he stopped short in the doorway filled with a great awe and grief, and surging over it a quick, youthful remorse for all he had ever done to vex and annoy the old man who had been so good a father to him; but Mrs. Herne went forward, kneeling down by the bed, and speaking in a voice which, for all the pitiful tremble in it, tried to be loud and cheerful.

"Robbie's come, father dear. He were away when the telegram arrived, an' never got it till yesterday, or he'd ha' been here sooner; but he's come at once now; an' don't ee' fret any more, dearie, for he's only wait-

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ing to see you before he goes off to find Maggie an' bring her home."

There was no answer that Robin could hear; but his mother raised her hand and beckoned to him, and, coming to the bedside, he saw that the Squire's eyes were opened and turned upon him. The once ruddy face was of a livid grey now, and all twisted and distorted, till it looked hardly human in its disfigurement; but long as it was since Robin had kissed his father, not since his childish days, and careless and disrespectful as he might be at ordinary times, he bent down now, pressing his lips on the cold, wrinkled brow, as with one hand on the Squire's, he said gently:

"Yes, father, I've come; and I'll bring her back to you; don't be afraid."

The Squire's lips moved, and a sort of gurgling mutter came from them; but it was only the wife's quick ear that understood and translated:

"You must go at once."

"Yes, father."

"To Southampton."

"Yes, father."

"Find out—about the boats to Havre and Channel Island."

"Yes, father; I will."

"Have—you seen—" there was a long pause here, and a look of sharp, terrible pains struggling with the old man's resolution' "*her* letter?"

"No not yet."

"Give it him."

And Mrs. Herne took with some difficulty a folded paper from under her husband's pillow and gave it to Robin. Turning a little away from the bed, so as not to see the suffering in his father's eyes, Robin opened it and read:

"I am writing this to bid you all good-bye, father and mother and everybody. I dare say I shall soon see you again if *he* lets me, and if you're not too angry to

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let me come. If you are I can't help it. I love Nino, the man I am going to marry, better than any one else in the world. I could not live without him now if the whole world tried to make me. And you don't want me. You have Ellice instead. No one here has cared for me since she came, except him: and he does. It will be better for you to have her than me. She can do all I did at home, and more; and I have made her lover promise not to marry her yet awhile that you mayn't be left alone. I dare say you think me very wicked, but everybody has always done that; and, after all, if I've not told you about Nino it was because you were so rude to him—father I mean—and Maid Ellice, as he calls her, has been just as secret about *her* lover. I shouldn't have gone this way, but she brought me his letter to say *he* was going, and I couldn't let him go alone. I am risking angering him now to write this, lest you should be anxious about me, and I will write again. if he lets me, when we are married; and I hope father will forgive me and not abuse him any more. I'd rather *not* be forgiven than hear him abused. Tell Robin if he turns up his nose at me I don't care; he always did; and good-bye, mother. I'm glad you have Ellice with you. She'll do better for you than I did; and I don't dislike her for it—now.

MARGARET."

A strange, hard, passionate letter, strangely like the hard, yet passionate-natured girl who wrote it. Little wonder it had crushed the simple old people, who had been nursing this child as a house-cat might nurse a young puma of the desert, in utter ignorance of its nature and propensities, and sent a keen pang of self-reproach through the brother, who, though he might have known her a trifle better, made light of the knowledge, and had given his whole thoughts and attention to that other, so unlike her; but he had no time to think of that now, or of the double crash which had come on him and her. His mother was speaking to him in that

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strange, forced voice, which sounded so infinitely pathetic, for the tears crushed down under it."

"Give it back to father, Robbie dear, he likes to have it in his care;" and then he saw that the old man was trying to make signs for its restitution. In silence he obeyed, his father making an effort to move his head so as to rest it on that part of the pillow covering the letter before, by his wife's aid, he spoke again:

"You will go at once?"

"By the next train, father."

"London or abroad—but London was a blind—they changed—mother will tell you. Go everywhere till you find her; an' then bid her come home. Wed or not wed, *'tis* her home, an' she's a right to come. Be she wed, think you, boy?"

"I should think so; she speaks of going to be married but if the man is a blackguard he may have deceived her. By Heavens, if he has," cried Robin with an ominous clenching of his fist, which made his mother start and shiver, "he shall pay for it and do her justice, or I'll know why! Be sure of that, father."

The dull eyes of the old Squire brightened.

"God bless you. He may ha' been honest that way, an' only feared to ask her o' me; but—anyhow, bring her; wife or outcast, she's our girl still: *ours* and no other. Tell her that."

"Yes, father; I will," said Robin hoarsely, a lump he could not control gathering in his throat.

"An' tell her the other wench is gone to her own folk. There'll be none to vex or say a harsh word to her. She should not ha' misdoubted us; but let that be. She'll learn wiser now. 'T'as broke my heart, but—she knew not what she did. Go now. That will do."

"*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*" The words came back to Robin's mind and took away any answer he might have made. He felt very far from forgiveness himself as he stooped and

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kissed the helpless wrinkled hand he had held before leaving the room.

His mother came out after him, crying again (though more softly now) the moment she was outside the door; but she could only stay long enough to add her messages of forgiveness and entreaties for the runaway's return, urging Robin to impress on her the state her father was in, and the fact that as yet her flight had been kept secret from all but one old servant, who had been years enough with them to willingly aid in guarding it, and a story made up that she had been kept at a friend's house the night of her father's stroke, and that, in consequence of it being judged better to keep him quite quiet, Ellice had been sent to join her and keep her from returning till he was better.

"If she'll only come back, Robbie, so it be but for a while, to see him, an' for the honor o' the name he cares so much for, we'll manage somehow so as it can be kep' quiet an' no one will say anything again' the man she's married. Oh! Robbie, don't say a word. If you make me think he's not been honest wi' my poor child, you'll kill me dead; an' oh! if you see him, be patient wi' him, for her sake," Mrs. Herne said, weeping bitterly; and, having obtained a hasty promise, which, in the indignant state of Robin's feelings, had little chance of fulfilment, she went back to her husband's side, her round, sweet-natured face so wan and puckered, that it was all her son could do not to curse aloud those who had brought such a change upon it.

And then, after a hasty harnessing of Grey Bessie in the dogcart, and hastier meal, for he had nothing to eat since seven that morning, Robin was off again, traveling—not as yesterday, in joyous mood and high spirits, to meet and clasp to his arms the fair young girl who had promised (God knew whether lightly or falsely!) to be his wife—but to seek a sister who had fled from her home, to see that the man who had taken her away did her justice, if he had not done so before;

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and to bring her back to receive pardon from the parents she had deserted.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"BEEN there, but left for Paris."

It was the same information, altered only in the last word, which after a long day's wandering to and fro in Southampton *he* had gathered there, and which had sent him on to Havre. Now it was to start him off again. "Paris!" So they had fled to the world's gay capital, had they? Little chance there of finding unaided, a tall good-looking artist and a swarthy-complexioned girl, with black eyes and hair, among the scores of artists and hundreds of swarthy, black-eyed women collected within the city of the Seine; but then on the other hand there were the Paris detectives of whose matchless powers he had so often read, to help him; and surely Margaret would come across the *Times or Galignani*, and see the advertisement which at Mrs. Herne's request Gordon had inserted in the former paper, and which Robin had ordered to be copied into its French contemporary in the hope that it might catch her eye.

It did catch others. There were people living in London, fathers of growing girls, too, who taking up the *Times* at breakfast read aloud, with a laugh, the simple message.

"Dear Madgie, come back. No one angry. Poor father struck down calling for you. Don't delay for *his* sake," and commented on it thus:

"Sick one gets of these sort of things! They read so touchingly, and one knows all the time that they're either thieves' warnings, or some love intrigue with the word 'father' thrown in for a blind. Bless you, my dear, didn't you know that? Why ninety out of a hun-

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dred are nothing else. This is a thieves' letter. I can tell it by the wording."

And there were people in Merehatch and the neighborhood, who despite the anxious care of the Hernes to keep Margaret's flight secret and shield her name from reproach, understood only too well the full meaning of that brief paragraph, and piecing it together with the scraps of gossip and rumor already flying about the district, damned the unfortunate girl with that unshaded blackness which can only be made blacker when those who impart it are not only neighbors but kinsfolk.

But to the Hernes the great object was that Margaret should see, and seeing understand it; and bitter as were Robin's feelings at present towards his cousin Gordon Maxwell, he could not but be glad that the latter's thoughtfulness and promptitude had paved the way to his own after-researches. Poor Robin! things generally were very hard with him just now; and when he took his seat in the railway-carriage for Paris you would hardly have known him for the sunny-faced young fellow who had sat opposite to the haggard-looking woman on the way to York. Like his mother he seemed to have grown older all of a sudden, with a worn, tightened look about the mouth, and more than one newly-graven line across his brow; and an utter absence of all his natural trimness and foppery, merged now in the dusty, shabby seediness of a man who has been traveling night and day without any proper rest or food; and with no other ending to his journey, even if successful, than one of such pain, humiliation, and embarassment as forty-eight hours before he would never have dreaded as likely to come within reach of any one reared under the peaceful shadow of the Croft.

Ellice had warned him not to make scorn of the quiet and simplicity of his childhood's home. Would to Heaven that he had profited earlier by her rebuke and had not encouraged in Margaret the spirit of

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restlessness, which, in the more passionate nature of the girl, had dashed her headlong to her ruin!

And Ellice herself, what of her? Was it true, this that he had heard? and had he indeed lost her just as he thought her won? Or rather, had he never really won her at all; but had been made the victim of passing quarrel between her and her lover, the decoy-duck to bring back a wandering bird to this fair lady's net? the prize by the capture of which she had consoled herself for some wound inflicted on her own heart by him to whom she had given in by which she had abandoned with as little regret as compunction at the first gleam of penitence in the offending one? If it were so no man had even been so shamefully treated as he, who a few hours' gone had hardly been able to dissemble his joy and triumph before strangers' eyes, and had woven plots, and counted the hours till he could get back to the little grey-eyed girl with the crocus-coloured hair whom he had found crying by the river-side; and who had turned the steady current of his blood to a stream of life and fire by the confession that she loved him. Loved *him!* But had she said so after all? It had been lowest of low whisper, that spoken in his arms with her apple-blossom face hidden against his breast, and often as he had asked the jealous question again, in his greediness to hear it repeated, he had himself stopped its being uttered by sealing the lips with kisses before they had parted into the word he craved.

Was she deceiving him the whole time?

A day or two back he would have struck to the ground any man who had dared to hint so foul a slander against the truth and purity of the girl he loved; but then a few hours back he would have boasted of his father as the halest and strongest man in all Downshire; and would have ridiculed the idea of Margaret having a lover, and a lover unknown to her parents, as one too absurdly far-fetched to be even listened to with gravity. Now, all was changed, and

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amid the general shattering of his home-bulwarks what was to show that Ellice stood any firmer than the rest? The old family ship had struck on a rock and gone down all of a sudden without word or warning. If she had been true would she not have stuck by the wounded skipper and his shattered vessel to the last, instead of deserting both to seek safety and happiness in her cousin's boat?

But suppose she had *not* gone willingly! Suppose they had driven her forth in their unjust anger? That question too much came to him in a whisper of mingled hope and pain. That the Hernes were anxious to have her gone so as to pave the way more smoothly for Margaret's return, Robin had felt with a mingled pain and resentment which all his tenderness for his parents, all his bitterness and jealousy against his absent love, was hardly able to smother; for whatever she might have done to *him*, however lightly she might have played with his affections and trampled on his love, he never for one moment dreamt of giving credit to the insinuation that she had known of Margaret's intrigue, and aided it for her own advantage. *She!* Why, his face grew hot all over, that any one belonging to him should have ever harbored such suspicion. Strangers, people thrown among deceitful and scheming women might judge of others by those they knew, and think as coolly as they pleased; but for himself, he who had seen the innocence and sweetness of the girl's spirit manifested in the thousand little unfoldings of domestic life, would have thought it blasphemy even to discuss the possibility of such treachery on her part with others; and an insult to herself to tell her that he put no faith in it.

"Believe me, mother, you are utterly wrong with regard to Ellice," he had said, even in the sorrowful hurry of departure; but Mrs. Herne only answered:

"La, Robbie, what's thy head runing on Ellice for? She's happy enough, an' none hurting her. Do

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'ee think o' Madge, love, *our* Madge. 'Tis her is in question; not any other girl!"

With regard to his own treatment, however, it was different; and here he had to palliate her conduct by imaginary extenuations so as to make it comprehensible, even in his own eyes. She had always been very candid about her love for Gordon, so candid that he had lost all hopes of winning her for himself, till he came across her that day at Hardleigh End; but what after all if it were a love unconscious of its own nature, and unsolidified by avowal or engagement? She had owned to him that she was crying because Gordon was going to be a priest, and would not let her come to live with him as his housekeeper; and his heart had so leapt up at the words that, forgetting everything else in his joy, he had prevented a further explanation by the avowal of his love; but was the simple desire to be housekeeper to a clerical cousin sufficient cause for that little white face and swollen eyes, unless, indeed, the former were loved with more than the love of cousin or sister either? *She* might not know it (in his loyalty and tenderness he was anxious to repeat that excuse, for her), but how was he to tell what had happened after he had left her? Suppose the whole idea of young Maxwell becoming a priest had originated in some little quarrel between the cousins, and that she had accepted him (Robin) out of pique, might not the very fact of her having done the latter (if Gordon found it out), have brought about an understanding and reconciliation between her and her real lover in which he had been forgotten as entirely as if he had never existed? Well, there was not much excuse for her even in this way of looking at it. Surely, if it were true, she would in common honesty have written to him; and indeed as it was he felt sorely hurt that she had not done so. He did not even know her address; but she must be well aware of his; for he had telegraphed to her cousin about the unhappy business which was taking him away, giving

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his address both at Southampton and Paris; and besides, how easily it would have been for her to write to him at the Croft; or to have left a note for him there. She must have known how strange and cruel her departure would seem to him. If she cared for him at all would she not have wished to explain it?

With all his shame and anger and anxiety about his sister, poor Robin could not keep his private trouble so completely out of his mind but that it recurred to him every few minutes like an unbidden ghost; and assuredly if there had been any one in the carriage who knew him they would hardly have recognised the merry and *debonari* young Oxonian of a few days back in the jaded and haggard-looking traveler of to-day.

There was one, though he did not know it. He had been alone at first, but afterwards a woman had got in at one of the principal stations *en route* for Paris and seated herself in the opposite corner to him. She was dressed in black and had on one of those gauze veils with a deep hem which so effectually conceal the face; but she might as well not have worn it: for though Robin mechanically put out his hand to help her in, he never thought of looking at her, or of questioning who she might be, but remainded absorbed in his own gloomy musings till, when they had nearly arrived at their journey's end, he was startled to the recollection that he had a fellow-traveler by her abruptly addressing him.

"It isn't so long since we were journeying together in an opposite direction; but *you* seem to find now that life is hardly more pleasant than I found it then."

Robin stared at her. He had been so completely wrapped up in his own thoughts that any one speaking to him just then would have startled him; but there was something in the words combined with the quasi-familarity of tone which bewildered him for a moment. Then a sudden light of recognition flashed into his eyes. She had thrown back her veil; and as his glance

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traveled from her wavy nut-brown hair to the anxious emaciated face beneath, he exclaimed:

"I have seen you before! Yes, I remember we traveled to York together. You—" the color flushed into his cheek and he made a sudden movement as if to spring from his seat. "Good God! you are the very woman who asked me about *him*."

"Him! Whom?" surprised in her turn now and shrinking a little back as if sorry she had spoken; but Robin was thoroughly roused by this time.

"A man I had never heard of then," he said bitterly, of whom I wish to Heaven I had never heard now. Gerrant, an artist. Do *you* know where he is at present?"

"Yes," she said calmly; though there was a nervous flutter about her lips; "he is at Paris."

"At Paris? I know that already; but where?" he was so much excited by this unlooked-for meeting, and the chance it seemed to afford him, that he forgot all *convenances* and almost common courtesy in his abrupt rejoinder. The woman recalled him to himself.

"Why do you want to know?" she said quietly; but with a searching glance which somewhat embarrassed her questioner. He met it frankly, however, and answered:

"Because, as it happens, I am going to see him at present; and it is very important that I should find him with the least possible delay."

"You have urgent business with him then?"

"The most urgent possible."

"And yet you had never heard of him four days ago."

"Nor he of me," said Robin with a sudden savage clenching of his right fist. "He mayn't have done that even yet, but——" he stopped with an involuntary gasp of anger, "it is a pleasure to come for him."

"You speak as if you had some quarrel with him. Do you mind—I might be able to help you—telling me what it is?"

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"I *have* a quarrel with him," said Robin sternly, "but it is not one I care to speak of. If you can tell me where to find him I shall be immensely obliged, and you will be helping not only me but—others very considerably."

"'Others beside you?' You are not a lawyer's clerk traveling in your master's interests? You told me you were at Oxford. Is it about anything in the way of money matters that you are at difference with him?"

"Nothing whatever," said Robin rather shortly; he was annoyed at her coolness and persistency. "And I have nothing to do with the law as yet. I shall have however, if the man chooses to avoid me."

"How?"

"I shall set a private detective on his track. Do you want to warn him? You may if you like. For it might save time. We shall meet anyhow."

"You want to meet him then, yourself?"

"I *mean* to do so—the hound!" said Robin, the last word muttered between his teeth. His companion looked at him curiously, a little nervous furrow in her brow.

"You have a great animosity against Mr. Gerrant," she said slowly. "You can hardly, however, expect me to gratify it, I who know him, unless I also know the reason for it. For aught you can tell he may be a friend of mine."

"If he *is*, I am sorry for you; but I don't want you to hurt him. I can do that for myself if I see cause. Since you know him though, you might at least tell me if he is likely to deal honestly by any one thrown into his power," said Robin, hesitating and growing very red; "any young person, ignorant of the world. You are a woman, it is not myself or any man I want to help; but a woman like yourself, only younger and more helpless."

Poor Robin! it was like the bitterness of death to put these inquiries with regard to his own sister; but Prov-

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idence seemed to have thrown a clue to her recovery in his path; and he dared not answer to his mother if he let it go. The effect of his appeal was, however, greater than he expected. His strange companion started to her feet, her hands pressed together and her color coming and going from scarlet and deadly whiteness with startling rapidity.

"A young woman?" she repeated hoarsely. "It's the old story, then." The train swayed from side to side, and she tottered, falling half on her knees, half in a sitting position at Robin's feet. "For pity's sake tell me—is your quarrel with him about this woman? Is—is she with him now?"

She was ten years older than Robin at least, and terribly in earnest. Even as she spoke, a long exhausting fit of coughing came on, and he saw to his dismay that the handkerchief she pressed against her mouth, grew dark with crimson stains. Compassion got the better of pride in the young man's heart, and he tried to raise and calm her; but she resisted, grasping his knee for support and reiterating her question until he answered her in one word:

"Yes."

"My God! and *you*—you are in love with her too?" she said. A ghastly change had come over her face, and the question was hardly audible. Before he could even answer it her hand relaxed, and she fell forward in a fainting fit, her face upon the floor of the carriage.

Almost at the same moment the train, which by its irregular movements had shown signs of coming to the end of its journey, stopped with a great heave and jerk; and Robin knew by the crowd and bustle on the platform outside, the shout of porters, rumble of wheels and mighty *hiss* of escaping steam, that they had arrived at Paris.

He lifted her on to a seat and jumped out without delay to get assistance and see about a fiacre for her He had common sense enough left not to care to be

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found alone in the carriage with a fainting woman; and it would have been too brutal for the most hard-hearted of men, which Robin certainly was not, to go his way and leave her to herself. By the time, however, that he returned she had partially recovered, sufficiently so at any rate to stand by the aid of his arm and to express her desire to be driven to an hotel (a very poor one in a shabby quarter) as quick as possible.

"I am very ill," she said feebly. "I must rest—rest and sleep before I can exert myself any more," and then she rather avoided Robin's eye and leant on the porter who was supporting her; but the former felt as if the clue he had nearly gained were slipping from him, and followed her so closely that when she was placed in the fiacre she could not, if she had wished, avoid speaking to him. Her face was still ghastly pale, but as he pressed up to the door she turned to him and said hurriedly:

"Thank you, and good-bye. You did not answer my question; but I will answer yours all the same. Take this girl away from him, whoever she is, as speedily as you can; and God help you! He *cannot* deal honestly by her if he would; and, unless he is wonderfully changed, he would not if he could."

"But his address—confound him! Only give me his address, and I'll manage the rest," cried Robin frantically and almost gasping for breath. The driver was already whipping his horse, and the woman had sunk back in the seat as if exhausted. As Robin hung on to the door in his eagerness she lifted her head, shaking it with a mournful dreariness in her sunken eyes:

"I do not know myself. I am trying to find out. Have I not been looking for him for weeks?"

"Then you can't help me! How did you——"

But the cab had driven on. In another moment it was out of sight.

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CHAPTER XXV.

FOR how many seconds Robin stood there where he had been left he could not have told. He was so bewildered by what seemed the cruelty of leading him on to tell so much of his own affairs, and then mocking his hopes at the end by not even giving him a scrap of the return information he so much needed, that he remained staring after the fast vanishing fiacre as if turned into stone; but with a heart full of such anger and bitterness, as no rigid-featured Memnon ever owned, until suddenly recalled to a sense of his whereabouts by a smart rap on the shoulder.

A man was standing beside him, a young man too, though several years older than himself, taller and larger made altogether, with a slouch hat covering his crisp, bronzed curls, and no shirt-collar to break the line between his purple flannel-shirt and full, powerful throat: a man in a desperate hurry or agitation of some sort; for his sun-tanned, handsome face was pale and his lips working as if with some sudden excitement.

"Pardon, m'sieur," he said, hardly waiting for Robin to turn his head, and speaking in French, though not sufficiently well for the latter had he known much of the language, for a native, "excuse my hurry; but my train is just going. You were speaking to a lady just now, whom I think I know. Would you have the kindness to tell me if her name is Scott?"

"*Le nom de la dame? Je n'entends pas—quoi—vous* ——" began Robin, bungling frightfully between his English offence at what he considered a liberty in a stranger, and that charming inability to speak any modern language beside his own, so characteristic of our University-taught young men.

The stranger interrupted him impatiently:

"The devil! you're English? I thought so, but I

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wasn't sure. So am I, and please excuse me; but I saw you putting a lady into a cab whom I thought I recognised: an old friend of mine in fact whom I've not seen for ever so long. Can you tell me her name, that I may see if I was right?"

"No, I can't," said Robin shortly. There was something about this man which irritated him to an almost unreasonable degree, and he showed it in his manner. "The—the lady," he had never somehow called her so in his own mind; though her dress, shabby as it was, might have belonged to one; and he hesitated involuntarily at the word, "may be a friend of yours or not. I know nothing about her, except that she traveled in the same train with me."

"And you didn't even hear where she was going? Devil take it! then I'm afraid I can't hunt her up,' cried the stranger with a persistency which Robin's huffiness in no way abashed. But before the latter had time to reply, even in the way of "setting down" his interlocutor, there was a shout from the train just starting.

'Holloa! Gerrant! Nino! hi there! You'll be left behind. Jump in, old man."

A second tall young fellow, also slouch-hatted and collarless, was standing just within one of the carriages, holding the door open. Robin caught sight of a bundle of sketching paraphernalia on the seat of the carriage, and whirled sharply around on his heel, but the train was moving; there was no time to speak, or even collect his thoughts, for at his friend's shout the individual who had been parleying with him had already dashed across the platform; and before Robin realised that he was gone, was already blocking up the door of the carriage from which his brother artist had been beckoning to him. How it happened that Robin followed in haste as desperate, and missing that carriage, sprang into another, the door of which was still open, landing while the train was positively gliding on, and amid a volley of ejaculations, remonstrances, and

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curses from the people and railway officials collected on the platform, he did no know himself, and never stayed to inquire. All he knew was that by-and-by he found himself breathless, gasping, and ticketless, in a first-class compartment of a train, bound he knew not where, except that it was *from* the city which a few minutes back he had been in such hot haste to reach; and therefore presumably taking him away from the sister of whom he was in search. It was not indeed for some seconds after he had begun to ask himself was he mad, or what had seized him to carry him so completely out of himself and his right way, that the answer came to him. He had heard the name of the identical man he was seeking, the man for whose whereabouts he had been inquiring so short a time before; and it was addressed to the free-and-easy stranger with the sun-burnt face and semicivilised attire whose inquiries he had been trying to shake off, that he might get away the quicker on his own business.

God in heaven! could it be *he* indeed!

Had Providence sent this villain who had stolen away his sister, the strolling artist who had for aught he knew made her name a byword and a mockery in the quiet country place where her ancestors had lived and died in peace and honor for so many centuries, to cross his very path, as if unwilling to leave him to the tardier vengeance of pursuit and inquiry? If it were so of a surety he would never scoff at special mercies again, or doubt the interposition of an overruling Providence in human affairs. Only God working with him could have led this man into his hand. The thing now was not to let him escape from it.

Fields still yellow with harvest, tall poplars stretching away in long monotonous rows hedges white with dust, a pale blue sky, against which, the white sails of frequent windmills showed like kites revolving in the breeze, now and then a cabaret with the sign of three red wine-bottles displayed in an azure ground; all the flat, same, yet pleasant country outside Paris went fly-

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ing past him as he sat watching grimly at the window of his carriage for the first place where they were to stop, and he be enabled to get out and confront his enemy.

It came at last, a very short "at last" in reality; but it seemed long to the young man watching and waiting at the window, like a terrier at a rat's hole; and then the train stopped at a little white-painted country station, and Robin was out of his prison in a moment and hastening to the carriage (three in advance he thought, but he was not sure) where his enemy had been confined. He was saved the trouble, however, of finding it; for almost as quick as himself the latter had sprung out, and was just taking a knapsack and small portable easel from his friend's hands when young Herne caught sight of them. He did not hesitate a moment; but walked straight up to his late interlocutor and said:

"Mr. Gerrant, I believe? I wish to have a few words with you if you will allow me."

"With me?" said Gerrant coolly enough, but staring? "Oh, certainly; though I don't know who you are——Stay, though, haven't I seen you before?"

"You spoke to me on the Paris platform twenty minutes ago," replied Robin, chaffing between the necessity for restraint before the third man and his wrath at Gerrant's *sangfroid*.

"Did I? of course I did; but I took you for a stranger to me then; though, now I think of it, there's something quite familiar in your voice. Very stupid of me I'm sure to forget you."

"As you never saw me before, you could hardly remember me, said Robin shortly. "I'll tell you who I am quick enough however if you'll come off the platform. I want to speak to you in private."

"I am not fond of speaking in private with people I don't know," said Gerrant hesitating and glancing towards his friend.

Robin interrupted him fiercely. He was fast losing

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the little self-command he had; and with it any hopes he might have had of overawing the other.

"Whether you're fond of it or not, I'm afraid you'll have to do it at present; so you may just as well not delay. Are you coming with me?"

"If I am, you may be sure it's at my own will, not yours, young sir," said Gerrant. He had begun to suspect something now; and his manner had changed to one half insolent, half sullen. "You may be a pick-pocket for aught I know. However, it's quite a matter of indifference to me: for I don't think I've much to lose to-day, and if I had I don't think"—glancing at Robin's smaller size and make with vast contempt—"that *you'd* get it without I let you. If you want to speak to me you'd better do it civilly, that's all."

He was following Robin's lead as he spoke; and, after a short delay at the barrier caused by the latter's want of a ticket, they turned into a narrow lane bordered by a high hedge on one side, and shut off from view of the station by two or three sheds and a clump of poplars. Here, after they had gone about a hundred yards, Gerrant stopped and said abruptly:

"Well, what do you want? We are private enough here."

"Want!" cried Robin, his eyes flashing as he turned impetuously upon him. "When you know my name you won't need to ask me that. Mr. Gerrant, I am Robert Herne of Hernecroft. Now, sir, where is my sister?"

"*Your sister!*" repeated Gerrant. He was prepared for the announcement, and kept his self-command capitally, not a muscle of his face moving from the mask of contemptuous surprise in which he had set it. "Excuse my repeating your words, my dear Mr. Hernery Hernecroft, or whatever your name is, but you must own they sound somewhat extraordinary. What the devil should *I* know about your sister?"

"You took her away with you—from her home," cried Robin, almost choking in the righteous wrath

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which yet placed him at such an immeasurable disadvantage, "a girl of nineteen!—No one but a thorough blackguard would have done such a thing. Where is she?"

"You are certainly a civil young gentleman, Mr. Henlofts," said Gerrant mockingly, though the color rose in his dark cheek. "Have a care that I don't refuse to answer language which none but a blackguard would use. I've told you already I neither know, nor want to know, anything of your sister. Indeed, judging from the present specimen of the family, I should say a man would rather leave than take them, which, if you've finished, I'll do with at present."

But Robin laid a hand on his arm, and it was not so easy.

"Not so fast, Mr. Gerrant; I don't care a bit what you say to me, so your insolence is wasted. Do you mean to deny that Miss Herne left her home with you on Thursday night and is with you now? That is my question, and if you don't call that taking her away—" cried the young fellow indignantly. "But there! I don't mean to argue with you. I've asked you a plain question. Will you answer it?"

"Most certainly. No young lady left, or was taken from her home by me," returned Gerrant coolly." "If any one, or half-a-dozen for that matter, called on me in my apartments" (emphasizing his words with a vicious sneer), "or happening to travel in the same train with me, entrusted themselves to my protection *en route*, that is quite another question, and one which concerns the young persons themselves, and no one else."

"I beg your pardon, sir, it concerns their relations and you," retorted Robin. "Yes, even though you are coward and dastard enough to shelter youself behind a girl's skirts by an insinuation which no one in their senses would believe for one moment, and which no man, scamp though he might be, with one grain of manliness in him would dare to utter. *My* sister Mar-

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garet run away with you, or any man, except by your persuasion and contrivance! A likely story that! I tell you what, you mean, dirty hound," his voice quivering and his hands clenching with passion, "I thought badly enough of you before, so badly that but for her sake, and for not caring to make a worse scandal of her folly and imprudence, poor child, than has been made already, I would have followed you, not to speak to you as I'm doing now, but to give you such a thrashing as would have taught you what gentlemen think when men like you steal into their households and entrap their innocent sisters into runaway marriages; but——Eh! what?" as a swift brutal change of expression on Gerrant's face made him spring forward, the hot blood rushing back upon his heart till his very lips were blanched. "Do you mean to say that she is *not* married to you. that——"

"Hold off!" said Gerrant fiercely, though there was a derisive smile on his lips as he warded with a slight raising of his powerful arm the younger man's clutch upon his shoulder. "I'm pretty patient, and can make allowances for you because you're a little fellow and excited; but keep your hands off me, or—Margaret's brother though you may be—I'll knock you in the middle of next week."

"*Will* you answer my question," cried Robin, pressing on him and utterly unheeding.

"The devil take you and your questions? Which do you mean?"

"Are you married to her?"

"Neither to her, nor any one else."

"Then, by heaven! you shall be, scoundrel as you are, and even though I shall take her home with me directly afterwards, and never let her look in your cowardly face again. My sister's name shall never be dragged in the dirt by such as you. Do you hear me, Mr. Gerrant?"

Gerrant looked at him with a sneer which turned the coarse beauty of his features to something diabolical.

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"Yes, I hear you. A charming programme; but doesn't it strike you that *she* may have something to say to the second part of it, and I"—the sneer settling into a defiant frown—"to the first?"

It flashed across Robin's mind then, from something in the man's tone, perhaps, that it might have been better for poor lost Margaret and the old people at home if by any means he could have kept his temper till he had seen her, and learnt from herself what he had to avenge. It was too late for prudence now, however, and he answered as hotly as before:

"What you have to say doesn't matter, only you'd better say nothing about *her*. You seem to have forgotten that she had a brother to protect her, but by ——, you shall remember it when I find out how much you have to account to me for."

"Find out what you choose," said Gerrant doggedly, but as he spoke he instinctively lifted his arms as if to ward off the anger he was provoking; "only if you think I am to be bullied into marriage with any man's sister, be she who she may, you're mistaken. I have no inclination for matrimony at present."

"You say that to me, knowing that if her flight gets abroad she will be ruined for ever with all respectable people," said Robin hoarsely. His mood had changed all of a sudden, and he did not spring forward as his antagonist expected. On the contrary, his face was pale, and he spoke in a lower and more restrained voice than before.

"To you or any one," retorted Gerrant.

"And knowing too that it was only her utter innocence of evil and ignorance of the world that enabled you, who must be a dozen years her senior, to lead her into the imprudence which, unless you do her justice, must be the ruin of life."

"I don't want to say anything against your sister," said Gerrant, "though I deny that I led her away in any sense. Ask her yourself if you doubt me, and if you can find her."

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"I mean to do so—when I have settled with you. Before I do that, be so kind as to give me her address."

"Sorry to disoblige you again, but I'm afraid I must," said Gerrant coolly, and a little put off his guard by Robin's quietness. "I never give a young lady's address till I know whether it will be pleasing to herself. Excuse me if I rather doubt it in the present instance. And now," with a slight laugh and gesture of leave-taking, "I think our business is pretty well concluded for the present. If you want me you can find me. I shall be at the Varieties this evening, and——*D*—it! What are you doing?"

For he had been too easy in his conclusions, and when in the act of turning on his heel was jerked back by a hand on his collar, which, strong man as he was, swung him round before he had time to resist.

"You *devil!*" said Robin between his clenched teeth. "Do you think you're going to escape so easily! You can shoot, I suppose; and you shall have a chance of doing so. There is my address," flinging his card on to the grass at Gerrant's feet. "But wait a bit first," as the latter made a struggle to free himself. "I've not done with you yet."

"Let me go, you fool!" stammered Gerant, scarlet with fury. "Do you *want* me to hurt you? Let me go, I say."

"Not till you've had one of the soundest thrashings you ever had in your cowardly life. I'm going to give it you," retorted Robin holding on, and raising the cane he carried. It fell once, with a sharp, stinging cut across Gerrant's cheek, raising a long, red blister as it did so; once and once only. Before it could be lifted again, there was a short, sharp struggle; a dead, crashing sound, like a load of wood felled heavily to the ground; and one man was lying face downwards in the muddy lane, with the blood flowing from his nose and mouth, and soaking into the earth in a dark red stream, while the other was walking rapidly away in the direction of the station.

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"He *would* have it, the young idiot!" said Gerrant to himself. "The idea of a lad of his size trying to tackle *me!* I wonder how soon he'll come to. He went down like a stone. Well, I can't help it; I dare say some one will come to his assistance, though it looked a lonely bit of a path, too, and as if people didn't often go by it. By Jove! he'd have been rather astounded if I had let out that I knew no more where the girl is than he does. I'd give something if I did. Whoever would have dreamt of her escaping me this way?"

He had come in sight of the station and his friend, who was lingering about waiting for him. They exchanged a few words together; not altogether pleasant ones, for the friend noticed the mark of the stick across his face, and Gerrant was not best pleased thereby. Apparently, however, he thought better of provoking a second quarrel, for it turned off in a laugh, and he proceeded to give an explanation which both amused his companion and redounded pleasantly to his own credit. They walked on into the woods; but did no sketching, and returned to Paris an hour later from another station than the one they had got out at.

* * * * * *

How long Robin lay on the damp, grassy soil of the lane he never knew. It had been a bright, sunny afternoon when he arrived at Paris; but when his sense came back to him, it was to feel the small, cold prick of fast-falling rain on his uncovered face; and the first effort to rise made him so sick and giddy, that for more than an hour he lay turned over on his back gazing stupidly with half-closed eyes at the rain pattering down on his up-turned face, and wondering with a dim, hazy wonder, what it was which had brought him there, and why his head should feel as heavy as a ten-pound shot, and his mouth, moustache and hair be clogged with something which turned his fingers red to touch. He had had a fall, but how! And every

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time that a gleam of recollection came back to him and made him start and try to struggle to his feet the same deadly faintness swept over him again, and he fell back, swooning away into a sort of half-stupor, more painful than actual insensibility.

Some one did, however, come at last; a country woman carrying a basket of live fowls on her back; and who, finding a young Englishman lying on the grass half-conscious, and with his face covered with blood, first made a great outcry, after the manner of her sex, and flung down her fowls and ran off, still screaming, to the station for assistance; returning therefrom before many minutes had passed with two porters and a bottle of brandy. The last item was the most useful. Robin had no sooner swallowed a mouthful than he sat up; and the second gulp steadied him so that he was able to stand up, wipe his face and declare that he was all right. He had had a fall and cut his mouth, an accident, he said, but he was only anxious to know what had become of the other Englishmen, the two artists who had arrived by the same train as himself.

The porters shook their heads. They knew nothing about the gentlemen in question. Artists often came from Paris to paint in the little wood at the back there returning at sundown to the city. Seeing that it was already dusk and raining, they had probably done so by now. Was m'sieur going back to Paris too? There would not be a train for five and twenty minutes from now, and would not m'sieur like to pass the time by washing his hands and face, and taking some rest and refreshment to restore him? *Parbleu!* his lips seemed cut through; and there was a lump *gros comme un œuf* on his forehead. Assuredly it was a villainous accident that had arrived to m'sieur! Robin understood the innuendo, but made no reply to it. For Margaret's sake—poor imprudent Margaret!—he would try at any price to keep his quarrel with Gerrant and its cause from getting into the papers; and indeed, now that he

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thought over what had happened, he could almost have cursed his folly for attempting to wrestle with a man twice his own size, and when to add to the odds against himself he was worn out with traveling, and weak from want of rest and food. It was indeed the effect of the latter want which had helped in all probability to keep him so long insensible; and even now he felt sufficiently giddy and shattered to be glad to take the civil Frenchman's advice, and try by a hasty meal and copious cold water bathings to make himself a little more fit for his return journey to Paris. He had promised to write or telegraph to his parents from there; but what news had he to send them which would not be more painful than silence? He had been helped wonderfully in his search; for not only had he met a woman who knew Gerrant, but had stumbled on the very man himself; and all to what end? Why, he did not even know the latter's address; nor that of Margaret. All that he had learnt was that she was not married; and his very heart turned sick, and the blood rushed into his scarred face as he recalled the brutal sneer which had answered his appeal for justice to the misguided girl, and thought of that darkened room at home, and the mother watching beside her husband's bed for the child who had deserted them.

It was past seven when he arrived in Paris, and he went straight to the hotel, the address of which he had given Gerrant, and asked if any gentleman or other person had been there to inquire for him. None had; and shaken as he felt, he changed his dress and went off to the Varieties on the chance of seeing him. Gerrant was not there, however. His own face was marked in too tell-tale a fashion for him to like to show it in public places even if he had cared to meet Robin again; and after waiting and looking about in all parts of the house for over an hour, young Herne took his sick and aching head home, and went to bed thoroughly exhausted. On the following day he was unable to move, and the hotel people sent for a doctor who

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pronounced it a slight concussion of the brain, and ordered him to keep quiet for a day or two; whereupon he sent for a detective that he might employ him to hunt up Margaret if she were still in town, and sent a messenger with a note to the hotel where the unknown woman had been driven. In less than an hour the note was brought back to him with the intimation that the woman had only slept the night there and left that morning, where for they did not know; and after that he had nothing to do but lie still and wait, not much cheered by a note entreating for news from his mother, and a telegram from Gordon to say that he was keeping a watch on Gerrant's London lodgings, and that the latter was still away from them and his address unknown. There was no word from Ellice and no mention of her in her cousin's message; and now it began to dawn on Robin's mind that even supposing young Maxwell were not in love with her, nor she with him, he might object to his cousin and adopted sister being connected with a family so irretrievably disgraced as the Hernes could not fail to be by Margaret's flight; and that Ellice shared in his opinions and was anxious to show as much by her silence. She was very pure minded and very proud, he knew, with a great shrinking from any thing unwomanly or unbecoming in her sex; and he was Margaret's brother and could not disassociate himself, or be disassociated, from his unhappy sister. In his suffering and unhappiness he had been on the point of writing to her at her cousin's address, and asking her why she had left his parents and himself so cruelly; but if this were the reason he could not in common manliness or delicacy force himself upon her. To find Margaret and take her home was his work, and he must think of nothing else. Poor girl! if she knew one half of the misery caused by her thoughtless and wrong-headed step, surely she would have repented, even if she had not done so before, of having suffered passion to lead her into it; but perhaps

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she knew nothing, and thought herself cast off by her family and her very name tabooed!

It was easy for the doctor to order Robin to keep quiet; but it was not so easy for the young man to obey the injunction.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AND here I think it is time to go back to Ellice, who, while her lover was in such sore straits, both as to the mind and body, and her lover's family in such grievous trouble, was quietly established at No. 3, Phillimore Gardens, Campden Hill, the guest of her aunt, Mrs. Devereux; and a much duller and less entertaining guest than that lady and her daughter were at all in the habit of bargaining for.

It had not been by any means of her own will that she had left Hernecroft. Nay, but for the poor old Squire and Gordon combined, she might have been there now, waiting on the bereaved wife and mother, and taking away one great source of pain and heart-ache from Robin by her presence; but though the old man's sudden and terrible seizure, following so instantly on his burst of wrath, might have blotted out the memory even of his angry words from the girl's heart—Women have a trick of forgetting themselves and their private feelings before any sudden trouble to their lords and masters—it was quite a different matter with Gordon. He had frequently seen men in fits before; aye, and for that matter women also; seizures of many kinds being in their most violent forms no rare occurrences in the back slums of Clerkenwell where so much of his leisure time was spent, and where unrestrained passion and drunkenness are not unfrequently brought to a climax in such manner and for that reason the Squire's "stroke," terrible as it was—so terrible indeed to the two women as to utterly un-

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nerve their powers for thinking and acting—affected him far less than the accusations leveled against his adopted sister, and the letter which Margaret had written in her flight. It did not indeed appear so at the moment, his nature being one of those who rarely show their deepest feelings on the outside; and poor little Ellice was so unhappy and bewildered at the accumulation of trouble that had fallen on them, and so grateful for his presence and helpfulness she did not notice the looks of stern and anxious inquiry which he cast on her from time to time, or the coldness and brevity of his manner. The crisis was to terrible for her to have time to think about herself just then; and though the tears kept rolling down her cheeks as she flew about the house trying to make herself as helpful as she could in the emergency, it was a source of comfort and gratulation to her that it was on Gordon rather than herself that all seemed to depend for assistance, from carrying the Squire up-stairs in the first instance, to galloping off to the nearest town to procure leeches, after the doctor's arrival, and later to the station to telegraph, as we have already seen, both to London and Scarborough.

The latter, indeed, was not his own idea, being prompted by Mrs. Herne's constant wail as she hung over her husband's motionless body: "If Robin were here, if Robin were only here!" But the former was a precaution which would not have occurred to either of the others until too late for it to be of use; and so Ellice told him when she met him at the house-door on his return. The night was long past by then, the doctor gone (though only for a time) and the morning sun shining gaily in at the old-fashioned parlor where the home party had held their lengthened vigil on the night before. There was no one there now; and its rays only served to light up Ellice's pale cheeks and tumbling hair and the dark circles round her eyes. Mrs. Herne's one request had been, "Don't let any one know as Maggie has left us. She'll never come back

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if it once gets about," and since then she had hardly spoken to Ellice; nor had the latter seen much of her; the old lady being shut up in her husband's room, where, after the doctor's arrival, Ellice had a natural delicacy about intruding. The one old servant who knew of Margaret's flight gave all the help that was required there, so that there was nothing for her to do, and the enforced silence and idleness, after the first terrible bustle, pressed so heavily on her that it was with an almost sick sensation of relief that she saw her cousin coming and went to meet him at the door with the news that his breakfast was waiting for him, and old Martha said that the Squire had opened his eyes and moaned before falling into the sleep in which he was then lying. Ellice had put her hand—such a cold little hand—into Gordon's when she began to speak; but though he did not let it drop, neither did he hold it comfortingly or stoop to kiss her, and only when she had done, said.

"You say my breakfast is ready. Have you and Aunt Maggie had yours?"

"Martha took her up a cup of tea. She would not have anything else, or let me go up to sit with the Squire while she got a little rest."

"And you? have you rested?"

Ellice shook her head.

"I could not, Gordon. How could I sleep, or eat either, when every one is so miserable and can do nothing—nothing at all to help?"

"It will certainly not help any one for you to make yourself ill," said Gordon unsympathisingly; "and it is better to be useless than a trouble to other people. I shall be glad of my breakfast I know, and you had better have some with me. I should have been back an hour ago, only I waited for an answer to my London telegram. As I thought, they had only taken tickets for there to throw us off the scent. Sit down without me, Lisa. I must go and tell my aunt about it."

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But though his toast was buttered, and his coffee ready for him when he came down, Ellice had not touched anything, and, doubtful and suspicious as he felt about her, he could not help feeling touched by the wistful, pallid perplexity in her face, and he insisted on her pouring out another cup of coffee and drinking it before he even answered her inquiry as to how Mrs. Herne seemed and whether she, Ellice, might go to her.

"No," he said then, "you can do no good, and she would rather be alone. She could hardly leave her husband to speak to me. All she wants is her son's arrival."

"And you have telegraphed for him? Ah! I wonder how soon he can be here!" cried Ellice, the color rushing into her face at the thought of his coming and what it would be to her as well as his mother.

Gordon laid down his knife and fork and looked at her with that long, steady inquiring gaze which Margaret had once before found so trying.

"Ellice," he said coldly, "I am your adopted brother, so you must not be angry if I ask you now what Margaret Herne and the Squire meant by your 'love affair' and the concealment you have practised? My uncle seemed to think that I knew, that in fact you had told him that I knew all about it; whereas, as you know, you have never said a word to me of anything of the sort. Indeed I never thought, never dreamt, that a girl as young as you——"

"Could think about such things yourself," he was going on to say when Ellice checked him. Her cheeks were crimson now and her eyes full of tears, not only from natural embarrassment at the confession she had to make, but at the remembrance of the Squire's wrathful and insulting words. That Gordon also should think ill of her was too terrible to be borne.

"Gordon, I do not know how they heard of it," she broke in stammeringly. "I never meant to conceal

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anything, only Robin asked me not to tell them till he came back and——"

"Tell them! *is* there anything between you and him to tell, then? Surely. Lisa, you have not let him entangle you into a love affair without his parents' knowledge? Good Heavens! I had hoped you would deny it as indignantly as I did for you only last night and now——"

"Dear Gordon, if you would only listen to me!" Ellice pleaded as he pushed back his chair and began to pace the room with a furrowed, anxious brow. "Don t you know that I would not do anything insincere? It was only yesterday that I knew it myself—that he loved me. I could not help it."

"Then he wrote to tell you so? You could not help that certainly; but in that case it is all on his side, for you can't have had time to answer him; and therefore you are not engaged to him, or in any way compromised."

"Yes, for he did not write; he came. *Querido*, if you would only stand still and not look at me in that way I'll tell you all about it;" and then Ellice did manage to tell her poor little tale though so nervously and brokenly that Gordon, in his stern integrity and utter ignorance of everything connected with love or girlhood, could make out little more than that she had met Robin yesterday unknown to the rest of the family, and had exchanged promises with him, holding her tongue about it afterwards,and meaning to do so till his return.

"It was only for three days," said poor Ellice, as she saw no signs of relenting in the severity of her young judge's brow; 'and you know, Gordon, it was *his* place to tell his parents, not mine."

"No, I did not know,' he answered rather sharply. Indeed, what did he know of such things? "and I can't tell you how vexed and grieved I am. Of course I know you did not mean to deceive them—did I not say so from the first? I felt convinced that that unfor-

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tunate girl was mistaken, and that you, *our Lisa*, would never have played so base a part; but Robin Herne's conduct is inexcusable, perfectly so."

"Gordon!" cried Ellice in dismay.

"Yes, Lisa, I am sorry to see that he has got such a hold on your liking, but I must speak the truth none the less. It was his duty to have spoken to his parents and ascertained their wishes before going to you at all."

"But, Gordon, men hardly ever do. It is not general; it——"

"Then it should be. Because the world is generally evil is no reason that one should approve of its evilness. It is not even as if you and he were independent people. He is living on his father, and you are his father's guest and ward, placed here in trust as it were, and bound to look on his parents as your own. An honorable man would never have taken advantage of your position to make love to you, and run the risk of bringing your guardian's displeasure on you, and losing you a home."

"He thought they would like it, Gordon," said Ellice with sorrowful humility, "and . . . and so did I. They *seemed* fond of me."

"So they might be; and yet not wish to have you for a daughter-in-law. It was cowardly to place you in such a false position and then to go away. Indeed, how you can reconcile *that* with his profession to care for you——"

"He was obliged to go, dear. There was no later train."

"Then he should have thought of that when he made this appointment with you, and have written to excuse himself to his friends." Gordon retorted sharply and Ellice had to remind him that there had been no appointment: her lover had met her by accident. Gordon looked incredulous. It certainly did seem strange that Robin, bound for Scarborough should have left the station and walked down to that particular copse at Hardleigh End for no earthly object, un-

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less he knew Ellice to be there, or perhaps had planned her going through his sister.

"I remember, now," said Gordon, "how her anxiety for me to take you there struck me at the time. I did not understand it then."

"Perhaps she only wanted to get us out of the way," suggested Ellice, hitting on what was in truth Margaret's one idea. "I am *sure* Robin did not know I was there. He was as much surprised as—as I was. Indeed I do not think he would have said anything then but for. . . . for finding me that way," and Ellice flushed up scarlet again as she remembered how Robin *had* found her, crying her eyes out upon a grassy bank, and how speedily her grief had melted away in the close clasp of his tender arms.

Gordon sighed. To him the pretty love idyll was nothing more than a piece of mischief and truancy such as two of his Sunday-school children might have got into, and all the more painful that Lisa, his sister and ideal maiden, was involved in it; not culpably as he believed, but so involved by that other evilly-disposed child, that he was obliged to sit as investigator and judge on both together.

"It is a very awkward affair," he said shortly, "particularly awkward as coupled with that poor girl's sinful imprudence, and her father s suspicion of your having connived at the latter to further your own ends."

"But you cannot think that the Squire really believed that!' cried Ellice, her slight figure drawn suddenly erect with wounded pride. "If he did. . . . but he *could* not; he was only in a passion. . . but if he did, I —I—don t think I could stay here in his house."

"That is just what I was thinking," said Gordon slowly. "I am pretty sure that he does believe it; and the unfortunate accident of your having allowed his son to entrap you into a promise——"

"Gordon, *por Dosi*, do not speak in that way of Robin! You do not understand, or you would not be so unjust to him."

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"If I am unjust I will beg his pardon and retract what I have said. Still I cannot but think that if, instead of taking you by surprise that way, he had tried openly to win you——"

"But I think he did try," Ellice interrupted again, her cheeks glowing as she recalled the many little instances of Robin's love for her which she had passed over at the time. "It was I who was stupid, not he who was uncandid; and then he thought I did not care for him and went away. I cannot think how Margaret knew about it, however, for she never said a word of it to me, and . . . . Gordon," breaking off suddenly to lay her hand upon his arm, her eyes filling with the hurt feelings she was trying to repress, "surely *you* believe me?"

"Surely, yes," he answered, meeting her look with one as comfortingly full and hearty as his tone. "I could as soon doubt my own word as yours, child, once you give it me. What grieves me is that it is not so with your guardians: and that you have managed by this entanglement to give a color to their suspicions.'

"They suspected *you* too dear."

"True, and if it were not for the trouble that has fallen upon them I should have left the house at once; not from anger or resentment (at least I hope not), but because if a man sits down tamely under imputed dishonor he in a way sets his seal to it. Lisa, what I have been thinking is that it should be so with a woman also."

"How? I don t know what you mean;' but she must have guessed, for her face paled suddenly.

"My uncle is in a most dangerous state, and will require his wife's constant attendance for a long while. You can be no use at present; and should their daughter be restored to them she will hardly care to have you, of whom she is evidently jealous for a witness of her shame or penitence. *I* cannot stay here, of course. Indeed I have told my aunt I will go up to town to-

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day that I may find out the man's London address and do what I can towards tracing his proceedings, so that no time may be lost, pending young Herne's arrival. Dear Lisa,"—and now for first time his face softened, and he took the poor little trembling hand from his arm and held it in his, half conscious as he did so that it was a wondrously long time since he had so taken and held a woman's hand, and that the soft clinging fingers had a different feel in them after all to those of the Clerkenwell school children—"don't you think that under all these circumstances you would be better away?"

"*Away!*" replied Ellice. The gentle tone and kind hand-clasp almost broke her down; but the idea suggested with it was so cruel, that her tears dried up in consternation.

"Yes, for a time at least, Lisa. I do not understand about love matters "(which was too true), "but I can't help thinking that if only two days ago you would have been quite satisfied to know young Herne was engaged to some one else, and to devote yourself to taking care of me" (and he smiled slightly at the latter idea), "that your affection for him can hardly be as deep as your fancy; but even if it were, and if it were right and desirable that it should be so, I think, considering all that has passed and the suspicions cast upon you. that you can hardly stay in the house with a young man whom you consider yourself engaged to, without his parent's approval of it."

"But, Gordon, how could I disturb poor Aunt Maggie to talk of that sort of thing now?" said Ellice, flushing up again at the very idea; "and he will explain it all directly he comes. Oh! why do you think that they would not approve?"

"I judge from their way of speaking Ellice; but if they do they will send for you back again; and remember, even supposing that their son has every desire to be candid with them, his first thought at present must be his sister, and her alone. No man of any feeling

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could force his own affairs on his poor mother's attention when her husband is in such a state; and even you——"

"Oh, Gordon, Gordon, don't!" cried Ellice in a perfect agony. "I know you are right; and I would not marry him—no, not though I loved him with my whole heart, unless they wished it; but I can't—I *can't* leave them now when they are in such trouble. What would they think of me themselves? And besides, I have nowhere to go, unless Mrs. Calthorpe would take me in."

"I don't think it would be advisable for you to ask it, if Margaret's flight is to be kept secret; but as to that, I had a letter from your aunt-in-law, Mrs. Devereux, this morning, saying they are back in town, and want you to pay them a visit. It is most opportune. Lisa, dear child, pray don't cry so. Of course I don't mean that you should leave here if you could be of use to the Hernes, or even if they wished you to stay; but if, as from something aunt said I fancy, they would be glad to be alone, surely it would be more honorable and delicate not to wait for their son's return, knowing that your doing so might only cause them more pain and anxiety."

Ellice was weeping bitterly, with her face hidden against his arm, but she answered without hesitation:

"If I even thought *that* I would go away—anywhere, to-day."

"Then I will find out before I start and tell you." And gently disengaging himself Gordon got up and left the room.

I think it must be owned that Ellice was to be pitied. Not only had she been obliged to submit to being parted from her lover immediately after he had won from her that confession which so inevitably changes the whole tenor of a woman's life, and to sit with his parents knowing that her love for him and his for her was unknown to them, and ignorant of how it would be received, but she had first been compelled to bury all thoughts of it and herself in the trouble of those

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around her; and then to drag it out as a criminal before a judge under the rigorous cross-examination of the man of all others whom she had most expected to rejoice in her happiness. Nay, more, she had now to let him dispose of her affairs and even of herself, though such disposal was wringing her heart, and would separate her at the most cruel of moments from him whom she loved and whom she so longed to comfort in the shame and sorrow which had fallen on him. And yet the poor child did submit, and with no thought of rebellion. Had not Gordon always been as a god to her and how could she then resist his godhead the very first time that he choose to exercise it? more especially when he did so in the name of honor and delicacy, words of such immeasurable potence to the mind of a sensitive and pure-natured girl. How he would manage his mission to Mrs. Herne she did not know, or even inquire, though it was assuredly one requiring sufficient tact and *finesse* to daunt a skilled and sympathetic man of the world; and I may as well say here, what the reader will have already divined, that his mode of conveying it, although perfectly straightforward and free of such intention, did impress on Mrs. Herne that Ellice was as anxious to be gone as he to take her away.

"It is not that either of us resent the injustice which, on my honor, I assure you has been done her," he said. "Indeed, if Ellice can be of the smallest service to you she would like to stay; but I have thought that under the circumstances, and with your *son* coming"—he emphasised this so as to show Mrs. Herne their motive—"you would prefer her to be away for a little, and I know her aunt, Mrs. Devereux, would be glad to have her. Of course she could return to you at an hour's notice, if you wanted her."

And Mrs. Herne said, "Oh yes, he could take her away. Most like Mrs. Devereux's house would be much pleasanter than theirs. Indeed the Croft were no place for pleasantness nor love-making now, and as

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to 'use,' the lass needn't stay for that. *She* could do all that was wanted for her old man, wi' Martha to assist her, and they wanted none else. Besides, her boy would be coming next day, an' maybe, if he found Margaret, the poor lass would be more minded to come home if she knew they were by themselves." All of which was said hurriedly outside the Squire's door, and with a sort of warmth and soreness at the idea of Ellice's eagerness to leave them, which poor, good Gordon was as far from understanding as a fly from reading the page of Sanscrit over which he walks. What did he know about women and their ways? All he took in was that Mrs. Herne wished his cousin to leave, and would not even retract what had been laid at the girl's door, for when he said to her:

"I hope, aunt, you don't really believe that Lisa could have encouraged or connived at your daughter's flight," the harassed mother answered him much as she did Robin later, only more sharply. "What business had he, her nephew, and a lump of sandy-haired lad, go cracking up his sweetheart, she thought speaking for *her* child in a tone as though he were judge and parson too; bothering her about nothing when she was wantin' to go back to the master!" Indeed, it was only her haste to do the latter which prevented her saying as much in words, and as it was, the impatient hurry of her departure, in one so placid usually, made Gordon feel more strongly than before that he had been right in suggesting Ellice's departure.

But of all this the girl herself knew nothing. She had built her hopes on Mrs. Herne's affection for her and wish to have her at her side in this time of trouble, and when, on his return, Gordon dashed these to the ground, her disappointment was so keen that it could only find vent in silent, sorrowful weeping—weeping which lasted long after he had started for London, promising to arrange with Mrs. Devereux, and return for her on the following day; and which so exhausted her at length that when old Martha en-

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tered the room to give her the doctor's report after his second visit, she found the poor child lying white and passive on the floor, with her head leaning against the sofa where she had been kneeling, and trembling in every limb as she sat up to inquire after the Squire.

The old man was conscious then, and had managed, partly by signs and partly by mumblings, to ask if Maggie were come back; and on hearing no, to express his conviction that she wouldn't while the other little wench was there, and his satisfaction on hearing that the latter was going away on a visit. Martha told Ellice this in blunt, though kindly, language, comforting the girl when she saw her lips quivering with silent pain, by speaking of it as a sick man's fancy having rise in his daughter's silly jealousy of her new companion; but it destroyed the last remnant of hope in Ellice's breast as to the chance of her being let stay; and so it came to pass that it was she who on the following evening passed Robin, all unknowing, as he was strolling aimlessly along Trafalgar Square, and found herself shortly afterwards established in the house of people whom she had never seen, and only knew by name as her father's relatives.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TAKING one thing with another, I don't think you could hit on a much pleasanter house in the West End than No. 3, Phillimore Gardens, Kensington, or much more popular people than the hostess of that cheerful residence and her daughter.

Mr. Devereux, Ellice's uncle, had been an eminently taking and popular man, a physician greatly favored by ladies, and achieving, as ladies physicians of a certain class usually do, a very considerable income, and no inconsiderable reputation by his profession. Also,

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in which it may be further said that he was not wholly unlike others in his branch of the fraternity, he had married a patient with a comfortable little income of her own, some five or six hundred a year, which, though very properly settled on herself and her child, had formed a not-to-be-despised addition to the means of the then young and rising doctor. At the time of his death the latter was making something like twelve hundred pounds a year, and might have doubled that had he lived long enough; but fashionable physicians are seldom able to lay by much consistent with the outlay necessary for keeping up their positions. Mrs. Devereux was not economical; neither was the house in Phillimore Gardens held at a low rent or maintained in niggardly style: for all of which reasons it was found at the doctor's demise that he had left so little behind him that but for his widow's private income she might have been reduced to being really badly off. As it was, she and her daughter had nearly eight hundred pounds per annum between them, the doctor having fortunately been always too busy in inducting other people's families into the world to think of adding to his own; and it is a fact that two people, when they are both ladies and don't keep a carriage, can live very comfortably on eight hundred pounds a year. People did indeed say that Phillimore Gardens would have to be given up, and wondered (deploring it the while, for the Devereux's "Thursdays "were very pleasant institutions) to what new locality they would move; but Lyle had said, that as I have discovered they could go on very pleasantly where they were, and so the name of Devereux still figured in the "Court Guide " against No. 3, and the "Thursdays" which had always been so charming certainly lacked none of their agreeableness, although they had no longer even the occasional presence at them of the master of the house; and although Mrs. Devereux, who had been a plump, pretty girl of the languid, soft-complexioned order, had degenerated into a fat, heavy woman, the soft com-

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plexion become pasty, and the languid sweetness mere lazy good temper.

It was Lyle indeed who was the true mistress of the house and manager of the "Thursdays," and perhaps a better would have been hard to find. At two and twenty, though looking old for her age from having been so long "out" and on view, she was one of the most charming of girls—charming to women and more especially charming to men, having inherited all her father's grace and suavity of manner, and part at least of her mother's beauty. Not that she had been a pretty child, or that she was exactly a pretty girl by nature; but that having very tolerable materials she knew how to make the most of them, and the result was by no means to be despised. Her hair was dark and glossy, and if she had not very much of it she "did" it after a way which ladies with thin locks will understand without explanation, so as to lead you to an entirely opposite conclusion; and though her eyes were not as large or brilliant as Margaret's, or liquid with the earnest sweetness which made Ellice's so lovely to some people's minds, they were dark like her hair, and she knew how to use them discreetly and make them laugh or soften in a manner which was very bewitching. Her complexion was her own and as good as her mother's had been, with a clear color in the cheek, which among London girls she knew to be rare, and which was indeed her chief title to beauty, and if her figure was less slight and lissom than Ellice's; it was more developed and set off by all the taste and skill which Paris corsets and exquisitely-fitting dresses could bring to aid in its perfection. But with all this it was not so much Lyle's appearance as her manner which won her the host of admirers who clustered round her in the ball-room, and made the five o'clock tea-table at No. 3 one of the best attended in Kensington. All that innocent brightness and readiness to adapt herself to others, which came to Ellice by nature, and had made her so quickly at home in the little Downshire village,

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belonged to Lyle, also, with the difference that the brightness was more often piquante than innocent, and the interest and adaptability so much a matter of habit and practice, that any quality of nature in it, had long since disappeared, it being called into requisition as readily for things and people the most distasteful as for the most agreeable to her.

Lyle was in the fact one of those woman who not only aim at making themselves all things to all men, but succeed. You took her into dinner never having seen her before, and before the soup was off the table, or you had had time to notice the color of her gown. she had found out your most special taste, or weakness, and was talking *to* it as if it were her own with a zest and fervor which surprised you into delighted agreement with every word she said. Or you were great on some particular subject, thinking yourself an authority on it, and somehow *that* subject, or a lane leading cunningly to it, was sure to crop up in Miss Devereux's conversation; and she would ask you innocent questions about it, with an eager look in her dark eyes that insensibly drew you on to a disquisition which if delightful to no one but yourself, delighted you with your listener, and left you with an enhanced impression both of your own cleverness and her intelligence. Lyle could not draw at all; nay, not even a pump or a three-legged stool with sufficient correctness to enable you to distinguish between the two; yet there were few young women to whom artists cared so well to show their pictures, taking much afterwards of her delicious appreciation of color and effect, and true artistic taste, just as musicians spoke of her correct ear and fine sense of harmony, whereas she could only play a few easy pieces learnt at school, and sometimes underwent real mental and bodily agonies in her efforts not only at keeping awake but at maintaining an air of intense pleasure while sitting through an interminable sonata in A by Haydn, or one of Beethoven's still more interminable symphonies for the violin; and as fox-hunters eulogised

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for a downright jolly girl, up to anything, with no end of a seat on horseback, when in truth she was a mortal coward and had never been in a saddle out of Rotten Row.

And all this at two-and-twenty? No wonder Lyle looked older than she was; though, thanks to her clear color and natural trimness and vivacity, she was one of those women who would look younger at thirty; and at forty would be infinitely more charming and popular than many girls of nineteen. She had had many admirers already and two or three offers, but as yet was disengaged; not because she was not intending to marry, but because she knew the value of her own charms too well to marry otherwise than well, and was not inclined to sacrifice her independence and resign the pleasures of her maiden home one day sooner than she could help. In the meanwhile she liked to amuse herself, and as her chief amusement was to fill the house with agreeable people and fascinate every one about her, and as she took a great deal of trouble about it, I do not think that she should be grudged her undoubted success, or that other women (married ladies with daughters and less fortunate spinsters) should have continually spoken of her as "that horribly designing, insincere girl of Lyle Devereux." What design, for instance, could she have in making love to Mrs. Burt, the curate's wife, or Gordon Maxwell, the civil engineer's clerk? and yet she threw quite as much devotion into her discussion of the little Burts' garments and ailments, and of Mgr. Capel's last sermon, or the music at the Pro-Cathedral, as she did into her delight in young Lord Albany's blood-mare; or her sympathy with old Mrs. Moneybag's troubles about her five footmen.

It is some women's profession to charm just as it is others, to teach or play; and I do not see that any one can be condemned for following their profession, more especially when all are pretty equally laborious.

It had been Lyle's idea to invite Ellice. She was

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quite alive to the fact that however agreeable a house may be, there is nothing that "draws" people so well as an occasional novelty; and a young cousin fresh from the other side of the world, a half-Spaniard, playing the guitar and speaking English with a foreign accent, would be a novelty more likely to be appreciated by the men at any rate than a new German *pianiste* or a costume *a la quinze siecle.* No. 3 had been let during the season to some inconvenient people who would only keep it till the end of August; and as the Devereuxes had wintered pleasantly at Rome, spent their Easter in Paris and their summer at the seaside, it was necessary for them to economise by coming home in September, horrible as that month cannot fail to be to people who are fond of society and like to see their friends' windows otherwise than plastered up with brown paper.

"But next month a good many people always come back," Lyle said resignedly, "and if we had her then, and liked her, she might stay still we go to the Burschenoffs'; and it would be an excuse for a little gaiety and be less risky than having her in the spring, when the more particular people are up. Besides, we haven't asked Gordon for ever so long."

And Mrs. Devereux agreeing (as she generally did to her daughter's suggestions), a pretty little note was written to young Maxwell, saying that they were back in town and wanted to know where he was, and if he would not come to dinner; also, when he had last heard from "the dear little stranger cousin," who Mrs. Devereux said reproachfully (though indeed it was Lyle who wrote the letter in her mother's name) ought not to be a stranger to them any longer; and Gordon must tell the dear girl when he next wrote that they were longing to know her, and that she must—positively *must*—come and stay with them before long; all of which would have been regarded by any man of the world, as it was by the writer herself, as on a vague preliminary to a possible invitation in the future.

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Gordon, however, took it literally as an earnest desire for Ellice's presence, and, rejoicing in its opportuneness, horrified the Devereuxes beyond all words by telegraphing in answer that Ellice would be delighted to come to them *at once*. He was only in London for an hour or two, and was returning to Hernecroft; but would bring his cousin up from there on the following day, unless inconvenient to them, which he hoped it would not be; and then he added, "Doctor advises it too."

Mrs. Devereux nearly had a fit on the spot.

"At once! *to-morrow?* Lyle, is that young man mad, or what does he mean? Send Dixon to the postoffice at once to telegraph 'Impossible.' Why, she will be here if we don't make haste. Lyle, what are you thinking of? Only fancy if she came —and ill too?"

Lyle looked up with rather a thoughtful brow.

"It's just like Gordon Maxwell, mother; though I didn't think he could construe my letter into a definite invitation; but after all I don't see why she shouldn't come, since she is so set on it. As to 'the doctor,' I dare say it's only that she wants change; and there is nothing to do but have the spare room got ready."

"But, my dear, in September, with every one away and nothing to do or see! She will be moped to death, and what shall we *do* with her?" remonstrated the mother.

Lyle laughed. She had a knack of taking things lightly.

"Well, mother, it will be her own fault; and as *I* am being moped to death at present she may serve to amuse me. Besides if she is delicate, and as eccentric as her forcing herself on us this way would seem, it would be really better to have her when we are quite by ourselves; and Gordon will have to come and bring some of his men friends to amuse her."

"But, my love, what sort would they be? Do you remember what a cub he always was himself: really *too* dreadful. I didn't so much mind it when he was

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said to be going into the Church; but in society one expects people to act and dress decently."

"Yes, mamma, I know. He *was* an awful cub; though as I have always taken the trouble of him, I don't think you ought to complain; and he's a cub now and dresses abominably; but for all that there's something striking in him, and people always ask who he is. He is so tall for one thing, and then he gets so desperately in earnest about some matters and is so absurdly naive about others, that, mad as he is, he amuses me."

"Then, Lyle, would you let her come?"

"Well, yes, I think so, mother: only we must remember to be more careful of our words when we are aborigines in the future."

And so, instead of the telegram "Impossible," Gordon on his return to the Croft found a little note saying how charmed they would be to see Ellice; though owing to the time of the year and the *shortness of the notice*, they feared she would find London very dull and wretched. Of *course* (in a P. S.) there was nothing infectious in question.

And Ellice knew nothing about all. In her sorrow at leaving the Croft she had never even asked to see her aunt's letter, and took it for granted that it was a regular invitation. The faint hope that Robin might return before she left, and the fear that something might prevent her even saying good-bye to that aunt by adoption who had grown so infinitely dearer than any mere blood relation to her, and whom she had not seen since her departure was decided, took up all her mind to the exclusion of lesser things; but Robin did not come; and though she saw Mrs. Herne, it was only for a minute or two outside the Squire's door, which was left open lest he should move, and with a couple of servants within hearing of all that passed. Under these circumstances, and more especially as Ellice was supposed to be going to join Margaret at a friend's house on the doctor's recommenda-

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tion that the house should be left absolutely quiet, it was of course impossible to say a word of a private nature; though if Mrs. Herne had not been so desperately anxious to return to her husband's bedside she might have read somewhat in the tight clasp of the girl's arms and the tears which rolled down her face as Ellice whispered (for they might not speak aloud) a timid entreaty that Mrs. Herne would write and tell her if there was any good news, and how the Squire was: also that if Mrs. Herne changed her mind or thought she could be of use, would she send for her back? She might be quite sure that she, Ellice, would never do anything against her wish; all she wanted was to be a help to them: much of which was rendered nearly unintelligible to Mrs. Herne by the fact that the latter was listening all the while for the least sound from the inner room; and still more so by Gordon's saying *his* farewells at the same time, and assuring his aunt (which was after all more interesting to her) that he would continue to make every effort to trace out Margaret's whereabouts and telegraph results to Robin: after which he hurried Ellice away lest they should be too late for the train.

Five minutes later she was at his side being driven rapidly to the station, and trying with turned head and streaming eyes to see the very last of the old house, which had been so pleasant a home to her, as long as even a chimney of it remained in sight.

It was not four months since it had first come into her view: and then it was the end of May, and she was sitting at Robin's side feeling very shy and nervous as they drove through narrow lanes under the exquisite verdure of the arching tress, and past fields where the wheat was still green and hedgerows fragrant with sweet white thorn and gay with wild roses and honeysuckle. Now, it was September, and though the golden harvest still lingered in some of the fields, others were already brown and bare and echoing to the "bang, bang" of ardent sportsmen, while the hedge maple and

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guelder-rose had put on their golden and crimson raiment, and the ruby-colored berries of the wild rose glistened like living jewels through the sheltering green. The summer was coming to an end, and with it all the happiness of the home which had given her so kindly a welcome a few short months ago; and as Ellice leant back in the railway carriage, trying though her tears to see the last of the pleasant homely country, her thoughts went back to him who had come, a stranger, to meet her at Southampton and bring her back to his home, and she almost forgot the man at her side who had been the idol of her life, and for whom *then* she had been longing with such wistful loneliness.

Gordon did not attempt to comfort her for some time. His thoughts were turned almost exclusively on Margaret, on the iniquity of the man who could lead a young girl to desert her family in so imprudent and heartless a manner; and the terribleness of the punishment which would fall on her when she learnt the state to which her flight had reduced her old father: more than all of the best means of finding her out: and of persuading her husband (if husband he was by this time) to let her return home, for a while at any rate, until the Squire was better and the scandal of her elopement getting wind averted. And suppose the man had deceived her! Suppose they were not married; or that he had a wife already! Ignorant as Gordon was of the world in some ways, he could not, living in this present age, and with all the daily papers round him, be ignorant that such things not only might be but were, and as the image of Margaret's passionate mouth and the almost wild gleam in her eyes rose before him, he shuddered to think of what might be the result of her finding herself duped, and cast about in his mind as to what could be done for her if she should positively refuse to return to her home.

"If she were only a Catholic, I know a convent that

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would receive her," he thought; "and where the sisters could calm and bring her back to repentance better than Aunt Margaret, with her fussiness and absorption in her home and husband. I wonder whether young Herne will get my second telegram and follow them to France before going home." And then his eyes fell on a great crystal drop which had just rolled down Ellice's cheek and was lying on the lap of her black dress, and he said kindly:

"Do not cry any more, Lisa; you will make yourself ill, and can't help her. Besides, I have no doubt her brother is now arriving at his home, if he has not already gone on her track; and as I shall keep a sharp look-out for them in London, I have good hopes of her recovery. *You* can aid her by praying that it may be to repentance, poor, wilful girl!"

Ellice started and looked at him with half-puzzled eyes. Margaret's part in the calamity had to her simply taken the form of a run-away marriage, a thing she had often read of in books, but from which the couple generally returned to be pardoned, after occasioning as much misery to every one else as possible; and her own mind had at the moment been absorbed in recalling the kindness of her welcome from Mrs. Herne on that evening in May four months ago and, regretting that she had not left a note behind her for Robin to explain her departure. She had wanted to do so as a matter of course, but on her saying something about it to Gordon he had seemed so surprised, and so confident that Mrs. Herne, and even the servants, might misinterpret the action, that Ellice, shrinking sensitively from doing anything to add to the bad impression against her, had given up the idea. Robin would be sure to miss her at once, and then his mother must tell him why she was not there. But suppose he was too hurt and angry to ask, what would he—what could he think of her then? And even to leave the explanation to another person was very hard, and must seem cruel in the extreme to him.

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"I was not thinking of Margaret just then," she said, blushing very much at the consciousness of how selfish the cause of her anxiety seemed to her cousin, and Gordon repeated in a tone of surprise:

"Not thinking of Margaret! I fancied you were grieving over her sinful imprudence, and the trouble it has brought on her home. You have been friends together, and she is so near your own age, that I thought your mind was even more likely to be with her than her poor father."

"I was thinking of—Robin just then," said Ellice, blushing yet more guiltily as she owned it. "It will be so dreadful for him, and when he sees I am not there and does not know why—Gordon, I wish I might have written to him. Surely it would not have been wrong."

And then Gordon looked almost angry. The young man was indeed more shocked at the levity and selfishness which could dwell on so trifling a matter at such a moment than appreciative of the girl's childish candor, and I'm afraid that for the moment he wished devoutly that Ellice also were a Catholic, that he might dispose of her in another convent. *Where* else were women safe from this dangerous folly of love and being made love to?

It wanted a few minutes to half-past seven when they reached Philimore Gardens, and Lyle met them at the door, looking very pretty in her graceful dinner dress. Ellice had dried her tears long before, but the traces of them were only too visible in her heavy eyes and white face,and I think the elder Miss Devereux deserved great credit for not allowing one shade of the intense anxiety she felt on the subject of her guest's woebegone appearance to be visible through the caressing warmth of her greeting.

"So sweet of you to come to us in this *unexpected* way," she said, not unwishful to give her self-invited guest a gentle hit for her want of ceremony; "and we have heard so much of you too from Gordon here.

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Mamma and I feel as if we had known you all our lives. Gordon, I haven't said a word to you yet, but you must expect to be a little put aside for your 'Lisa' just at first, and we will talk to you at dinner."

But Gordon made it immediately apparent that he was not going to stay to dinner. He had only come to leave Ellice, and then he had business to do. It was the Hernes' business, of course, and he had been traveling all day, and wanted his dinner more than anybody, but he did not say that; and Ellice's whispered persuasions for him not to go till after he had dined were as unheeded as Lyle's merry teasing as to the destination of a bunch of wild flowers which he carried carefully wrapped up in two or three large leaves.

"Evidently there is some other young lady in question," the latter said gaily, though a trifle piqued withal. "Dinner is a prosaic thing in comparison, and perhaps *she* will give him some. Who is she, Cousin Lisa? do you know?"

"They are for a sick Irish boy," said Ellice simply, and too sad a heart to smile. "Gordon is very fond of him, and promised to bring him some flowers from the country; but he had no time to get any before leaving, so when he stopped at a little country station to change to the main line, he ran across to some fields and got these while I was having some refreshment."

"And he told you they were for an Irish boy! You *are* an innocent little thing," Lyle said, laughing and kissing her; but the laugh was not visible a few minutes later when she ran into the room where Mrs. Devereux was dressing for dinner, and, after describing the arrival to her, said:

"I do call it too bad of Gordon to take himself off and saddle us with her the very first evening. And, mamma, I can't help thinking she has been *sent* away from that place for something. Her eyes are as red as if she had been crying all day, and when I asked her if they hadn't been very unwilling to let her go she stammered,

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and the tears came into them again. By the way, isn't there a grown-up son in the family?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IF Lyle hoped to find out anything as to the correctness of her surmise that first evening, however, she was mistaken. Gordon had said to Ellice:

"If Robin Herne really cares for you he will write to you as soon as he finds you are gone and his mother tells him the reason. You may be quite sure of that."

And so with a firm trust in the arrival of that letter, and an equally firm resolution of keeping Margaret's trouble and her own from strangers' ken, Ellice managed to come down to dinner looking, by the aid of dress and cold water, very different to what she had done on her first arrival. Pale and grave she was certainly; but the former was accounted for by Gordon's previous reference to "the doctor," while the latter passed muster as the natural shyness of a young girl newly thrown among strangers; and the sweetness in her voice and eyes made amends for it, and won greatly on Mrs. Devereux during the first evening.

"I could almost think it was your poor papa speaking. The brothers were greatly alike," she said to Lyle; while Ellice's simple explanation of her coming, by a reference to their "kind letter of invitation," which Gordon had conveyed to her, coupled with the sudden and dangerous illness of her guardian, almost baffled that young lady's easily roused curiosity.

"I suppose as he has a wife and daughter you were not wanted to help in the nursing," she said; and Ellice answered very quietly:

"No;" adding after a moment, "I wanted to stay and help; but Mrs. Herne and the doctor said he would be better if the house were left perfectly quiet."

"I should not think you were very noisy, Cousin

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Lisa, even with young Mr. and Miss Herne to help you," said Lyle gaily.

And Ellice again answered with that quiet, "No."

There was not much to be got out of her the first night.

But the following day was harder to go through; for there was no letter from Robin or any one. Gordon did not come to see her till the evening; and kind and charming as Lyle made herself, her very sweetness rendered Ellice's reserve a more difficult thing to maintain. She was glad when Lyle proposed to take her to the Exhibition of Water-colors in Suffolk Street, because looking at pictures must stem the tide of talking about herself; though at the same time her anxiety for a letter would have made her elect to stay indoors if she could, lest one should come while she was out. On, however, this point she had determined to be patient, knowing that if the runaways had gone to the Continent, as Gordon suspected, Robin might not in the hurry of following them have had time to write to her; and though her heart was torn by doubts and anxieties, she managed to keep them well under cover and walked from room to room at Lyle's side, listening to the latter's remarks and looking at or admiring the pictures, according as they struck her uneducated eye, and with as much readiness as though she had nothing else on her mind

I don't think that her admiration was very discriminating. She had hardly ever seen a picture in her life before, South America being a *terra incognita* so far as art is concerned; and a few blackened oil-paintings of religious subjects and her mother's simple water-color sketches being all she knew of the art-divine:" besides which, her mind was not sufficiently absorbed in the matter to enable her to detect faults or beauties which did not readily attract the eye; so that on the whole, this collection of the works of modern painters, mediocre as autumn exhibitions are wont to be, filled her with awe and admiration, and with a great

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sense of her own ignorance and all she had yet to learn. Still she said what she thought about each simply and honestly, and Lyle agreed, or *seemed* to agree, with her so completely that she felt as if she must know more about it than she thought after all. It was well she did not hear her cousin's after-comments:

"My dear mother, it really would have amused you, only I was so afraid of other people hearing her and thinking we were a pair. Fancy her passing by a tiny bit of Tadema's without even looking at it, the only thing worth having in the gallery, and going into raptures over a pink baby with mauve shadows struggling out of its mother's arms in a sort of strawberry-cream sunset effect. I had to insist on stopping a minute for the Tadema; not that I cared about it, but I knew young Elmslie and Haller were coming here to-morrow, and that I must say I have seen it; and she asked me, 'Why do all the people crowd here so, cousin? Surely not to look at the little picture! Why, it is nothing but three marble steps and a mulatto girl. It is not pretty at all,and there is no *story* in it.' Oh! I should have liked Mr. Haller to hear her; and she is such a child too. The tears really came into her eyes when she was standing before a horrid daub of Lear cursing Cordelia; and she grew pale—quite pale as she stared at a stupid unfinished sketch of a gipsy by Nino Gerrant. I had to touch her arm and show her I was moving on; or I expect she would have burst out into wild admiration.

Lyle was wrong. She was a keen observer of the outer face of human nature; but the heart lay too deep for her, and she could not see into it. There was no fear of Ellice breaking out into admiration of Gerrant's sketch. It was its likeness to Margaret—being indeed done from her—which had attracted the girl's attention, and made the color fade from her cheek; but she said nothing: she took it for a coincidence, and never even thought of asking the artist's name when Lyle's touch recalled her to herself, so that the latter could make

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no guess as to what was in her mind; while it was not the beauty of Cordelia or the somewhat theatrical coloring of the picture which had affected her, but something in the grey, ruffled hair and wrathful eyes of Lear which reminded her of the poor old Squire; and Lyle was both amused and embarrassed when later in the day her cousin said to her:

"I am so glad, Lyle, that we like the same pictures. I was afraid, as I had never seen any before and know nothing about them, that you would have picked out quite different things to me. But perhaps you are not much of an artist either? I expect the two who you say are coming to-morrow will think quite differently to what we do."

Lyle was not sure that she liked that *'we.'*

Gordon came also on the morrow; but he had nothing to tell her, save that Gerrant and Margaret had been traced to France; and when Lyle saw her speaking in an undertone to Ellice she came up and took him away, saying gaily that he must not monopolise his cousin all the evening. Mr. Elmslie would be introduced to her, and he must go and talk to mamma.

"Miss Devereux will be able to tell you what she thinks of the water-colors. We were there *yesterday*," she said to young Elmslie, with a half smile, suggestive of a hint she had given him that she had some aborigines staying with her who would give him some fun. But as it happened, the artist had been greatly taken by Ellice's fair pale face and willowy figure. "*What* an 'Elaine' she would make!" he said to himself; and the gentle look in her liquid grey eyes as she turned to him on Lyle's challenge and said very frankly,

"I cannot tell you what I think about pictures, because I never saw any in my life before. One must get familiar to a thing before one knows what to *think* about it," fairly captivated him; and he answered warmly:

"Ah! if only some London young ladies were like

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you: girls who know as little about art as if they had never seen it, and yet jabber the jargon of it till one is sickened by the repetition of the eternal self-same phrases. Yes I should think *you* cared about pictures."

"Yes," she said quickly, and with a sudden warmth in her eyes, "I do. I did not know how much till yesterday; but I hope I should care more understandingly if I knew more of them. Can you remember your first play? I can mine. It was a little Spanish comedietta, and I thought it more bewilderingly beautiful than a dream, I was so happy. Six years later I saw it again, and it seemed to me very poor, silly, and extravagant; but all the same I am glad to have *had* the happiness earlier—glad that the beauty of the dream was not brushed off for me then."

"If I could hope that six years hence I should be talking to you of your first visit to a picture-gallery, *I* should feel happy," young Elmslie said.

He was quite in love with her, and thanked Lyle warmly for the introduction; but Ellice was wholly unconscious, and was thinking of Gordon, to whom she did not get another chance of speaking in private. She thought she might have done so if he cared to manage it; but he did not seem to try, and went away at last without another word to her on the subject which occupied her heart. He had not even mentioned Robin's name.

Poor Ellice! she tried very hard to believe that her lover was too much occupied by the search for his sister to be able to think of her; and told herself many times that was quite right it should be so, and very wrong and selfish of her to even wish that he should act otherwise. Her faith in him was greater than his in her; and if she had only heard from his mother or any one at Hernecroft, she would have been content to await patiently till he had done his duty to his family and taken her news of him second hand; but though she had written to Mrs. Herne she had received

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no answer; and even Gordon noticed the extreme pallor of her face, when, a day or two later, he came again to see her.

"London does not agree with you," he said; "or have you been keeping late hours? I have always thought the life Lyle Devereux leads a most unhealthy one, with neither useful occupation nor real happiness in it. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Not very much," replied Ellice. "We breakfast quite late, you know, and then there is shopping and lunch and the paper and new books to look at, and yesterday we dined out. Lyle says town is empty, but," with a weary little sigh, "it seems *crowdedly* full to me. One cannot breathe easily for knowing the numbers and numbers of people who are crushed together and opening their mouths to get that breath of air as well; but, Gordon," checking him as he was about to say something about the crowding in the East End, and speaking in a lower, more eager tone, "have you *nothing* to tell me from home, or of her? I am so anxious to hear."

Gordon frowned slightly.

"Yes, I have heard of her. They were in Paris. There is nothing good to tell you, Lisa. Indeed, I think the subject is one you had better not think about. Pray for her if you like, and for her parents. I am very sorry for them."

He was turning away as if to show that he considered the matter done with so far as Ellice was concerned; but the girl was not to be put aside so summarily. Her face, a moment back so pale was flushed indeed now to a deep, painful tint; but her eyes met his firmly and unshrinkingly as she said:

"Gordon, I cannot *help* thinking of Margaret. You forget that we have lived together and that she is—" her voice faltered here, but she went on bravely—"Robin's sister. How can I not want to hear about her when I know what trouble her running away has brought on her and her parents? And I have heard

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nothing—nothing at all—from any of them. Won't you tell me all you can, at least?"

"You have not heard from Robin Herne, then?" said Gordon, looking at her keenly. "I thought he would have written to you."

The color deepened still more in Ellice's face, and her lips trembled. Had *she* not thought so too, and with good right? It was the only answer she made for a minute; and then she said, almost in a whisper:

"Have *you*, Gordon?"

"Yes; I have had two telegrams from him and one note. The last was to-day. He is in Paris, and his message was to let me know that Nino Gerrant left France yesterday for London. I went to the man's lodgings at once, and heard that he had arrived last night."

"And—and Margaret?" said Ellice breathlessly.

"She was not with him; but he had given notice to leave immediately on arriving, and had been packing all the morning. He was out when I went there; but he may be going to join her somewhere."

"Unless—do you think, Gordon, that she may be with Robin? You say they have been in Paris together and——"

Again Gordon interrupted her with a frown.

"My dear Lisa, you are getting quite pale again with excitement. Do not talk about her any more. Wherever she may be, child, I fear it will never be fit for *you* to meet her again; and I am only sorry you should have been thrown as much with her and her brother as you have been. If it hasn't done you any harm as yet, I am sure it can't have done you good."

"*Querido*, pray don't speak so. Do you forget that Margaret is dear Aunt Maggie's only daughter? I am sure it has done me good to be with them; and as to Robin, if you only knew him——"

"I know this, Lisa, that the way in which he has behaved to you proves to me that his principles must

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be little better than his sister's. Indeed, I wonder that you do not feel——"

"And how do you know I do not?" cried Ellice, her eyes filling with sudden, uncontrollable tears; "but I *cannot* judge him as you do. I believe in him, and I believe that he trusts me to do so, and to understand that his duty is to look for Margaret now. He may not even know where I am; and—and I can wait."

"Cousin Gordon, surely you and Ellice are not quarreling!" said Lyle, coming up to them with that sweet smile which made her face so attractive. "You look—oh! you don't know how stern you look; and Ellice as if you had been making her cry. Why, I thought only lovers quarreled, and really——"

"But I am not quarreling with Gordon, Lyle," said Ellice, conscious that her eyes were wet, and trying to smile, though she could not help feeling vexed at the interruption. "We were only talking about his relations, with whom I have been staying. You know they were in great trouble when I left them."

"Ah! and is it not strange, then, that you have not heard from them since?" said Lyle readily. "You must be so anxious for news of old Mr. Herne. Indeed, I thought you would have been followed by cart-loads of letters, but she has not had one, Gordon, not a single one!"

"There is no one to write but my aunt," said Gordon coolly, while Ellice blushed so red that Lyle was confirmed in her suspicions that there was more behind the scenes than she had been told of. "And of course she is very busy. My two cousins were both away when their father was taken ill."

"And do you mean they *stayed* away? How very strange! I wonder their mother did not send for them, or that she spared you too, Ellice. Surely she must have wanted help!"

"If she did she could have had it. I imagine that she is the best judge of that," Gordon answered in what Lyle inwardly styled his "bear's manner," while

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Ellice murmured something of the son and daughter being in France. The young lady's questioning was very embarrassing to both, but fortunately, she saw as much herself, and thinking she had gone far enough for the present, changed the conversation into pleasanter channels with her usual easy tact. Afterward she carried off Gordon, and talked theology to him in the spirit of an earnest but child-like inquirer after truth, till she not only sent him away in a good humor with himself, but with a higher opinion of her than he had ever before entertained.

He had never taken much interest in Lyle previously, but this evening he began to think that there was more depth in her than he had given her credit for. She had spoken as if she was not really happy in the idle, worldly life she led, but thirsting for one of fuller faith, and greater sacrifice and devotion; and he found himself talking out of his heart to her with kindling eyes and rising color, and half feeling as if Ellice were to blame for not joining in the conversation, but sitting out of earshot of them, winding some wool with listless fingers, which often dropped on her lap for minutes together. It is true he never talked of his own religion to her. He had given a solemn promise to her mother that he never would, or in any way use his influence over her in that direction; and, as we once heard him say, a promise was a sacred thing with Gordon Maxwell. But her moral welfare was a very different matter, and one which he considered as specially under his charge. Had she not always appealed to him for guidance even in the most trivial matters? and now that a serious difficulty had arisen, one which he honestly believed most dangerous to her and likely to imperil her happiness for life, she showed, if not a disposition to rebel against his counsels, one which was certainly disinclined to accept them as final and conclusive; and with this, a far more dangerous inclination to submit to the influence of a person against whom he felt as much anger as he had ever in-

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dulged against another man. In his opinion Robin Herne had trifled, both wantonly and culpably, with the affections of his adopted sister; and Gordon's love for her made him resent such conduct the more bitterly since he believed that, but for his opportune presence, Ellice might possibly have been led into the very deceit and ingratitude against her guardians of which they believed her guilty.

"I'm glad I took her away," he said to himself, as he walked home that night. "I suppose he would say he had only been flirting with her, but she evidently believes that he was in earnest, and I will not have the child flirted with. I am not sure that it has not done her mind harm as it is. An innocent young girl as she is ought never to hear of such things as her unfortunate cousin's story seems likely to turn out. It should have been sufficient for her to know that Robin Herne and I were doing our best to find the poor girl and restore her to her parents. 'Unspotted from the world,' that is what I have always hoped to keep Lisa; but how is it to be done if she is to listen to young Herne's love-making, or live in an atmosphere like the Devereux's?" And then he bethought himself that he had heard Father Bertram speak of a cousin of his, an Anglican lady who had established a *creche* for poor children and was in want of help in their management. "That would be wholesome work for her," he thought; "and she can't stay at the Devereux's forever. I will ask him about it."

He was at the door of the clergy-house by now, and on ringing at the bell was told by the porter, a lame Irishman, that a gentleman had called to see him, and was waiting in the parlor.

"A gentleman!" Gordon repeated in surprise. He was so unused to visitors of his own class that the news, in conjunction with the lateness of the hour, startled him a little; but he walked straight upstairs without waiting to inquire or wonder who it might be, and

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turned into the little parlor on the first floor. It was a small, square room, with grey walls, hung with two or three engravings from sacred pictures, and a huge crucifix over the mantelpiece; the two windows filled with pots of geraniums and mignonette; the floor painted brown and polished; a big bookcase at one end, filled with books, and for the rest of the furniture a table, a horsehair sofa, and a half-a-dozen chairs. On one of these latter the visitor was seated, a young man about his own age, but dark-haired and bright-eyed, and with a pleasant, frank expression, which was evidently only temporarily clouded by the look of worry and anxiety which sat strangely on it at present. Gordon had never seen him before, but there was something in his face which instantly recalled to him both his own father and Mrs. Herne's kindly features as she lifted up her face to kiss him in the pleasant, old-fashioned parlor at the Croft, and he was about to put the thought and its sequence into words, when the young man forestalled him by saying:

"You are my cousin Maxwell, I suppose? I am Robert Herne, and I only arrived from Paris this afternoon." He held out his hand as he spoke—a smaller, more delicate hand than Gordon's—and the latter took it; but the clasp was not warm on either side, and after young Maxwell had asked him to be seated, he said:

"You came to me, I suppose, to know if I have any news for you. I went to the man's lodgings as soon as I got your telegram, and found he had arrived, but was out. He is leaving again, however, almost immediately."

"Then I must nail him to a meeting without delay. Will you go with me? This is the first day my damaged head has let me get about, and traveling has made it *muzzly*."

"Certainly, or without you if you think it better. I suppose that you know he is alone?"

"I know that he left France alone. Then—she—is

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not here?" said Robin, with a little catch in his breath at the mention of his sister which moved Gordon's pity. Certainly if the young fellow had not been so Bond-Street-like in his dress and appearance, he would not have had much of the air of an evil-minded Lothario. Gordon spoke more cordially than he had done before.

"No, and therefore I have hopes that she left him as soon as she found out his real character."

"Do you think so? I hope to God you're right!" cried Robin, his face flushing. "I could find no trace of her in Paris, or of her having been there at all."

"You are sure that she has not seen the advertisement and gone home?"

"Yes, I had a line from my mother this morning. The poor old governor is just the same. There is no news there." Robin's voice had grown suddenly husky, and Gordon felt his heart softening to him more and more.

"What can I do for you?" he said abruptly. "We are cousins. You can use me as you could not a friend in a case like this. Please do."

"Thank you," said Robin simply. He too felt the kindlier influence of the straightforward fellowship Gordon seemed anxious to show him, and forgot for the first time that this big-boned, fair young man was his rival in Ellice's love, the Galahad of her imagination. "You can guess what I mean to do. Call that fellow out, and if he cannot or will not clear my sister's name, shoot him like a dog. I can't ask a friend to stand by me for fear of the real reason getting wind. Will you do so?"

It flashed across Gordon's mind what Father Bertram would have thought had he guessed that such a proposal was being made in his own clerical parlor to his own favorite boarder and pupil; and of the words of horror and reprobation in which alone he could have imagined its being answered. Autocrat as the young man liked to be with his little cousin, he had

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always been as docile as a child with the good priest of St. Ethelberta's-in-the-Slums—asking his advice and carrying out his precepts with the readiness and simplicity of an affectionate son. How it happened, therefore, that immediately on that flash of conscience he found himself answering:

"With great pleasure, and the sooner the better," it is impossible for me to tell; but that he did so is very certain; and also that when Robin added with feverish hurry:

"It is barely eleven. Is it too late for you to take him my message to-night?" that he answered in the negative, and took up his hat with equal alacrity and good-will. The young men went out together and called a hansom; and on the way Gordon said:

"I hoped you were not waiting long for me?"

"Only half-an-hour. The servant told me you were always in at ten."

"So I am generally, but I was spending the evening with the Devereuxs—cousins, and could not get away."

"Oh!" said Robin. He had grown suddenly pale and spoke shortly, feeling like a man in whose face a glass of cold water has been suddenly dashed; while Gordon on his side felt ready to bite his lips with vexation at having mentioned his cousin's name. A moment back he had been ready and eager to befriend his companion, looking on him as a man rightfully bent on avenging a wrong done to his sister, even as he would have done in a similar case. Now, it occurred to him that this young fellow he was assisting had in truth been equally guilty in wronging Ellice, though to a less degree, and was equally deserving of reprobation for the way in which he had trifled with her affections, and then left her to suffer injustice and censure from his parents without a word of excuse or explanation. Gordon's brow grew dark at the recollection, and he drew rather away from his kinsman, staring out of the hansom with angry eyes, and won-

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dering in his ignorance whether most of the young men about town (those outside Father Bertram's fold *bien entendu!*) were of the same breed as this Herne and Gerrant, and if so, how they could find the face to rise up in condemnation of each other. He could not draw back from his offers of assistance; but he felt in heart that he had rather they had been made to any other man; while Robin on his side was struggling hard with the jealousy and mortification which prompted him to go his way alone and fight his sister's battles by himself, rather than accept the aid of the man who, whether as a lover or otherwise, had taken his darling away from him; and who had just returned from spending the evening in her sweet society. He would have given worlds to ask about her, how she was, and where she was, and a thousand other questions which had been in his heart for days; but till he knew in what capacity Gordon stood to her he could not utter one of them; and as nothing was further from the latter's mind than to touch on the subject at all, the two men, a moment back almost brother-like in their joint errand, sat on stiff and frozen in a silence which grew more constrained every moment; and were thankful when the cab came to a stand-still, and they were able to spring out at Gerrant's door.

"You had better wait for me outside. I shall not be long," said Gordon shortly; and Robin only nodded. He wanted so much to say that on second thoughts he would rather dispense with his cousin's services altogether, that he could say nothing at all; and having dismissed the hansom, paced moodily to and fro the pavement, wondering bitterly if Ellice had never spoken of him to his rival; and if so whether the latter must not think him very mean-spirited to come to him for aid in his trouble, till on turning he saw that Gordon had come out of the house, and was walking quickly to meet him. His first words utterly changed the current of Robin's ideas.

"He is not there, Herne. He came back with a cab

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shortly after my call this afternoon, and left with all his possessions."

"*Left!* where?" cried Robin, standing still in his dismay and looking very blank.

"He wouldn't say; but the cabman had orders to drive to Charing Cross. My belief is, that when he heard he had been inquired after, he became anxious to get out of the way and keep his skin whole."

"By——, the fellow is the most cowardly hound I ever heard of! But he shan't escape so. I'll follow him up—confound him!—wherever he is. See if I don't!" Robin cried out between his teeth. Gordon looked at him full.

"Men cowardly enough to deceive women are not likely to be brave with their fellow men," he said bitterly. "Well, I don't see that I can be of any further use to you to-night. When I can, you know where to find me."

"Thank you, yes," said Robin. The same offer and the same answer as those made earlier in the evening; but spoken now in a colder and very different spirit; and followed by a formal "good-night."

The young men parted without another word.

"And when Ellice knows that he never so much as named or asked after her, I do believe her own sense must tell her that she has deceived herself, and enable her to put him out of her mind for good and all," Gordon said to himself, as he hailed an omnibus going east, and clambered up to a seat on the roof.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE days that followed this were some of the least pleasant for Ellice to look back upon in after times. That terrible heart-sickness of a hope deferred was beginning to tell on her, and to rob her of her

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natural brightness and vivacity to a far greater extent than she was at all aware of. It was a damp, muggy autumn too, and London air pressed heavily on her unaccustomed lungs, and robbed her cheek of color and her step of elasticity. Mrs. Devereux said that the girl looked dreadfully wishy-washy, and ought to see a doctor. If she were going into a decline the Hernes had no right to send her up to them; and she ought to be returned to them at once before she got worse. Lyle declared she had something on her mind, and did her best to find it out; but both were baffled, for Ellice declared that she was quite well, and did not want a doctor, while her resolution to guard Margaret's secret made her impervious to all hints and questionings on the subject. But the close rooms and formal visits where she knew no one and no one spoke to her, the want of country walks and home occupation, all added to that greatest weariness of all, waiting for news which never came, starting at each ring at the bell, watching for each postman's knock, going out with the thought, "Will he come or write while I am away?" and come back to find the thought vain, and neither line nor message for her: all of which combined was making her quite a different girl to the sunny-faced little maiden who had won all hearts in that out-of-the-way Downshire village.

She had heard from the Croft at last; not, indeed, from Mrs. Herne, but from the old servant who alone was in the secret of Margaret's flight; and from her she learnt that the master still kept his bed and seemed to get no better. Missis's time was completely taken up with watching him, and her hair was grown quite grey. There was no word from Miss Margaret yet, nor they didn't know where she was; and Mr. Robin was in London. How she (Ellice) liked her kinsfolk? And hoped she would pay them a long visit. Nephew Gordon had written her how kind they were; and indeed London town must be much gayer and pleasanter for a lass like Ellice than their dull home.

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Ellice answered this by saying how much dearer the dull home was to her, and how willingly, *willingly* she would return to it if Mrs. Herne wished for her; but she got no answer to this, and though neither she nor the old lady mentioned Robin's name, she fancied that the latter would understand her waiting for permission to return as referring to him, and took the subsequent silence for a further veto on the love which he had once told her would be so cordially sanctioned.

The greatest blow to her was to learn that he, too, was in London, breathing the same air, perhaps passing her in the streets, and yet never seeking her out or writing her a line to say what kept him away. Her faith in him had triumphed for a long while over silence and neglect; but about this time it began to flag, and she asked herself if Gordon might not be right after all in his opinion of the relative whom from the first he had seemed to doubt. He was wise enough usually in his judgments, she thought; at any rate she had yielded herself implicitly to them in other matters. Why should she have rebelled, and set herself so obstinately against him in his? She startled him one day when he had looked in for one of his flying visits after office hours by asking him:

"Gordon, do you know that Robin Herne is in town?"

To her surprise he answered very quietly:

"Yes."

"Have you seen him?" she said quickly, and with a little pant in her breath which betrayed the excitement within, and annoyed her cousin.

He had hoped from her silence of late that she was beginning to forget the young man who had so willfully disturbed her maiden peace: but he answered her at once, though in a tone unconsciously repressive:

"Yes, two or three times."

She drew a long breath, and her face, which had flushed at asking the question, grew very pale.

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"Does he not know I am here, do you think?" she asked, in a lower tone than before.

"Yes, I conclude so;" with some surprise. "He has never said anything about it, though I mentioned having been with you one evening. My meetings with him have been strictly in connection with his sister. I fancied we had a clue to finding her last week, but it turned out to be some other girl. We hardly ever speak of anything else. But why do you ask?"

"Because . . . ." her voice faltered uncontrollably, and something like a mist seemed to rise before her eyes and blind her. "He has never asked after. . . . . *me* then!" she said, her two hands pressed tightly together at the palms, as if to keep back the emotion which was struggling for expression.

And Gordon answered very clearly and distinctly.

"No, he has never made any allusion to you whatever."

If he had had any idea of the suffering he was inflicting on her, this slender little creature with the childlike, wistful eyes standing at his side, he would certainly have softened his answers or the mode of giving them; for Gordon had no liking for inflicting pain, and though his stern sense of brotherhood would have led him to sacrifice her whole earthly happiness rather than allowed her to descend by one hair's breadth from the pure and lofty altitude to which he loved to raise her, principle might have been modified in practice when it came to wringing her heart-strings as he was doing now; but she made no reply; did not speak at all indeed for some minutes; and he never guessed—how could he!—of the bitter tide of pain and humiliation which was fighting against maidenly dignity and reserve and being beaten down and conquered so near him. He even went on after the silence had lasted a few moments and said:

"I fancy he is a frivolous young fellow when his feelings are not worked up as they are at present by his sister's disappearance; but he doesn't seem a

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scamp, and therefore I think, Lisa, you must have been mistaken. Of course I do not know the exact words he used to you, but I can't help fancying you must have falsely estimated his meaning or——"

She put up her hand quickly. She had not flinched from the cruel wound he had inflicted on her a moment back. It was necessary to bear—nay, even to invite it, that she might know whether she was right or wrong in trusting in her lover's constancy; but there is a limit to all human fortitude, and this calm, moral vivisection was more than she could bear.

"Yes" she said hurriedly, and in a voice which did not sound like her own, "you are right. I was . . . . *mistaken* . . . . that is all. Thank you for telling me, dear. We . . . we won't speak of it again. I would rather not."

"And you are quite right," said Gordon approvingly. He was pleased with her now, feeling she was not going to be willful and indocile after all. "How do you get on with Lyle?" he asked, with a ready change from the unpleasant subject. "She seems to me to have more in her than I fancied—a vein of religious earnestness which, if properly worked, would, I believe, break through the crust of worldliness which has grown up around it. Doesn't it seem so to you, Lisa?"

"I—I hardly know," said Ellice absently. Her mind was full of a very different matter to Lyle's religion or want of religion, and the latter was not in the habit of discussing theology in general and early church discipline with *her*. Lyle always chose her conversation discriminatingly and with a view to the feelings and opinions of the person addressed; but Gordon was not aware of this, and his answer betrayed a little pique.

"Ah! I forgot; it is a subject in which you don't take much interest; but perhaps when you get a little older you will find out, as Lyle has done, that it is the salt of life, after all, and more important than the trum-

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pery little matters with which we fret and delight ourselves in our every-day existence."

Perhaps it was fortunate that Ellice's mind was too much crushed at the moment to take in what he was saying; or she might have felt this rather hard, Lyle's enjoyment of the "salt" in question being strictly reserved for Gordon Maxwell and a certain high-church curate of her acquaintance. With both these two men, equally worthy and earnest, she was a great favorite at present, for to both she said exactly the same things about devotional services, church regulations, fasting and the dear London poor etc., varying her conversation a little, it is true, so as to suit their different views, as, for instance, when she said to young Ffoulkes Surcingle, "I sometimes hardly know how to be grateful enough for our dear Anglican Church, with its rich ritual and pure Catholic faith, uncorrupted by those errors which have crept into the Roman branch and separated them from us. Ah! if only all our people could appreciate the privileges we and they, too, enjoy!" while to Gordon she said; "Do not think too badly of me for not being able as yet to believe all you do. Though I am outside your Church, yet I respect it heartily, and reverence it as I never could that poor imitation of its ritual, which is disturbing ours at present and causing such trouble among our people. *You* are honest, Mr. Maxwell;" which flattered poor Gordon's vanity and made both him and young Surcingle (as true and hard-working a young fellow as ever stepped) think anything but badly of her. Yet even Ellice could have told how lightly Lyle talked of such matters at other times; and how thoroughly worldly she was at heart, devoting herself to the "trumpery little" cares and delights of London society life with a tireless persistency, which, at times, almost jarred on the younger girl.

That latter, indeed, from having grown up in a simple and less unnatural atmosphere, had imbibed, with all her pretty Spanish ways and graceful modes of

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dress and speech, a certain seriousness and unworldliness not very dissimilar from the "Mayflower" Puritan maidens of old. Her religion was not one of form or talk. She loved her God and could say her simple prayers to him in a Spanish chapel; or lead the village choir in the parish church at Merchatch with equal devotion and happiness. True, she did not know much about creeds and dogmas, hers was summed up broadly in the belief in one God and one Saviour to be loved and followed after, and a good many different ways of doing both. Gordon's way was not the same as hers, but what did that matter so long as it led him to the same end? People could only go the way they had been taught; if the object was the same, what could the road signify!

This was Ellice's creed, a highly unorthodox and illogical one, perhaps, as if I need not point out to my better instructed readers, but one which contributed greatly to the peace and happiness of her life, and for which the circumstances of her early life must be regarded as in some sort answerable.

She made no answer to Gordon's remark at present, hardly hearing it indeed, so little did Lyle and her religious feelings matter to her just then; but when her cousin's remembering that he had a book in his pocket for the latter young lady, rose to give it her, she laid her hand on his arm and said gently:

"Wait one moment, dear. I want to say something to you."

"What about Lisa? Nothing wrong is there?" as he looked down in her face, which, even to his eyes, had grown wonderfully older and whiter in the last ten minutes.

"No: but I have been thinking—I cannot stay here always, Gordon."

"Well, what then?"

"Where I am to go when I leave? They do not want me at the Croft, and I have no other home."

"I hope it would not be difficult to find you an-

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other, with Uncle Herne's sanction, if it were needed, Lisa; but you are not leaving here yet, and before you do Margaret may be found or her brother have returned to college, and their parents want you back."

"I do not think that is likely," said Ellice; "and—and—" her voice trembling very much, "even if they did—I—I think now—I had rather—Gordon," breaking out with sudden impetuosity. "I *could* not go back as things are. You are the only person belonging to me. Won't you think for me, and try to find me some place where I can go when I leave here?"

"But why do you talk of leaving yet? Are you getting tired of them?"

"No; but I have thought perhaps they do not expect me to stay long. Mrs. Devereux was talking yesterday of something they must do when I am gone; and though people used to come to us at the estancia and stay for months, even without an invitation, I am not sure that it is the same in England. What did they say in their letter to you when they invited me?"

"I forget; but if they wanted you to go I should think they would tell you so. *I* would in a moment," said Gordon, with a cheerful ignorance of the ways of society, which it would have killed Lyle to hear. "But Lisa, don't imagine I have no thought about your future; and I think I know of a home where you would not only be safe and happy, but useful to others and living for some one besides yourself."

It seemed to Ellice just then as if it were a cruel mockery to talk of her being happy anywhere; but safety and usefulness sounded pleasant, and she was too crushed even to ask more about it then. Gordon was sure to know what was good for her; and she was content to leave it to him.

She felt almost glad when he went away shortly afterwards, that she might creep up to her own room and drop the mask of bravery which she had worn downstairs. For Robin not only to be in the same

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town with her, but to know where she was, to be meeting her adopted brother and never even to ask after her, or mention her name—oh! it was too cruel. And she had loved him so well, she had believed in him so loyally. How could he have been false to her? How *could* he?

She was out walking with Lyle on the following morning. It was October now, and the leaves of the horse-chestnuts in Kensington Gardens were turning to brown, and the maple to red and gold. Dingy brick houses blushed bright under the crimson wreaths of virginia creeper draping their smoke-blackened walls, and china asters, yellow, white and red, with here and there a tall purple dahlia, made gay the borders in London squares and gardens. Above, the sky was a faint, cool grey; but there must have been sun somewhere; for as they came into view of the Round Ponds in the gardens, they could see the gilded pinnacle of that triumph of gingerbread ugliness, the Albert Memorial, glittering like a star above the intervening foilage; and there was a gleam of steely light on the ruffled waters of the pond, where a score or so of children where amusing themselves by throwing bread to the gaily-feathered water-fowl or swimming their toy boats on the surface of the mimic sea.

Lyle and Ellice turned away from the noisy, shouting little crowd with its circumference of nursery-maids and their attendant soldiery, and struck across the gardens in the direction of the Serpentine. It was one of Lyle's ways of preserving her youth and complexion to take morning walks whenever the weather permitted, and Ellice was only too glad to get out into the air, away from the streets with their babel of wheels and cries and voices and crowds of jostling passengers, and into the quiet shadow of the trees, with the rooks cawing in the tall elm-tops overhead, and their own footsteps making no sound on the humid path where the leaves were already lying in brown, rustling garlands. They did not meet many people in these

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parts, now and then a governess with a couple of long-legged, fuzzy-haired pupils at her side, a girl with the unmistakable look of waiting for her lover, or more rarely a man waiting for his sweetheart; now and then the two together "taking their pleasure sadly," as the French have it against us.

"But there are not half so many as in the spring-time," said Lyle. "That is the time for lovers. They seem to come out with the horse-chestnut blossoms and the May. Now, I believe that one half of those here come for no other purpose than to meditate on the best way committing suicide. *Felo de se* becomes fashionable in London as soon as the leaves begin to fall, you know. Look at that young man now getting up from the bench near us. He's evidently a gentleman and has nothing to do; but doesn't he look as if he were meditating on nothing less dismal than the relative merits of laudanum or a saloon-pistol for putting himself out of this weary world? Perhaps, however— Why, Ellice, do you know him!

For Ellice, glancing at the person adverted to, had stopped short with a little startling cry. The gentleman in question was Robin Herne; and as her eyes met his, she saw that he had recognised her first.

Whether he had meant to pass her by, or with only a bow, she could not tell. Having seen her from a distance, *he* had had time to recover his composure even if he had ever lost it; while her self-command had deserted her in a way which would have been simply impossible to a London girl; and for which her own sense of womanly dignity, inexperienced as she was in the *convenances* of society, made her bitterly reproach herself. She was indeed trembling all over, and her very lips were white with the suddenness of the recontre so long looked for; but she had no time to recover herself, for he had stopped also, as of course in duty bound, and she found herself touching his hand and even introducing him to Lyle as though they were only ordinary acquaintances and he had never held her in

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his arms that day at Hardleigh End among the ferns and flowering sedges by the river's side. Lyle's face had worn an expression of well-bred surprise just sufficiently marked to show that she required some explanation of Ellice's extraordinary lapse from good manners; but at the mention of Robin's name it disappeared, and she came to the fore at once, smiling so pleasantly that her bow seemed twenty times more cordial than Ellice's handshake.

"Mr. Herne?" she repeated. "What a pleasant surprise for Lisa! and how fortunate that we met you! I suppose you have only just arrived in town, or she would have seen you before. Were you on your way to us now? It is nearly lunch-time and I am sure my mother will be most pleased to see you."

But Robin said he could not go back with them then; though the why and wherefore seemed rather vague and indistinct. His eyes were fixed on Ellice's pale face and nervous lips, which had not seconded the invitation by so much as a look or word. Lyle's eyes took in both faces.

"You can't? I am sorry," she said, "for I can see Ellice is disappointed. She is moping *dreadfully* with us, you know. Indeed I am afraid you must think her looking quite ill. We do."

"You are not looking well," said Robin, his eyes kindling with a quick, tender anxiety which sent the blood in a hot rush to Ellice's cheeks. "Have you—I hope you have not been ailing since I saw you?"

"*I* think she is dying of *ennui*," Lyle put in gaily as Ellice answered in the negative. "But you know what London is at this season, perfectly horrible. You have just turned up at the right time to prevent her running away in despair; and I hope you will come to see her as soon as you can."

"I am only passing through town myself thank you," said Robin. What else could, could he say if Ellice *would* not speak? Her silence seemed only too sure confirmation of all he had heard. "My father is still

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very ill; and though I have been up on—business for him, I go down to-morrow to see him and my mother. She is in great trouble about him;" and again he looked at Ellice, it seemed to her reproachfully. "I am afraid therefore I shall not have time to call on you; and I must not keep you standing now. Good-bye." He lifted his hat as he spoke, and after a second's hesitation held out his hand to Ellice. She put hers into it; but though he saw her lips move, no sound came from them: not a single word; and her eyes, lifted to him for one second, seemed to him as though they were full of tears. Changing his mind on the impulse of that idea, he turned to Lyle.

"If, however, I might look in for five minutes this evening?" he said. "Perhaps Miss Devereux might have some message for my mother;" and being given cordial permission so to do by Lyle, seconded by a faint word or two from Ellice, he went on his way and left them.

But when they were out of sight, when the tall black trunks and yellow leaves had swallowed them up, and he had gone far enough to have time to reflect, Robin bitterly reproached himself for his changeableness in accepting the elder Miss Devereux's invitation. What had he done it for? Ellice had not expressed a word of pleasure at meeting him, or of hope that she should see him again. Could any one indeed have been more icily cold to him than she had shown herself on this their first meeting after so long and sad a parting? Truly she must have been very anxious to make him realise that she had changed her mind before she could have brought herself to behave with such absolute unfriendliness to one who had been her loyal servant and companion ever since her arrival in England; and when he *had* realised it, had summoned up manliness enough to show her that he did so by putting an end to the interview, why, in Heaven's name, had he gone back from his resolution, and committed himself to what could only be pain, pain keen and unavailing, to

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both? Because he felt her hand—such a pretty little hand even in its glove!—tremble as he held it in his own, and fancied he saw a mist of unshed tears over the sweet grey eyes so dear to him? Because of the shadow which had come over her little face, and the paleness in her cheek? But all these things might be, and love for him make up no part of them. She was shy and sensitive, and the very sight of him and consciousness of how he must have suffered through her might have been distressing to her.

Would it not be better and more manly for him to break his engagement and not to go near the house? It could do him no good to see her again, and perhaps Gordon Maxwell might be there. Yes, he would stay away.

CHAPTER XXX.

"SHE says she's well enough to go out, and she will."

"She ain't then. Why, she's just as weak as weak, an' couldn't sit for 'alf an hour without faintin'."

"Well, you tell her so then, Lottie, for she's in one o' 'er wilful moods, an' won't mind me. She says she ain't goin' to be eatin' and sleepin' at our expense no longer."

"She's a fool, an' I'll tell her that. As if I didn't earn four shilling from old Matherson yesterday, and am goin' to do the same to-day. Here, I'll go to 'er."

Two girls standing outside of the door of a room of the second floor of a cheap lodging-house in Pimlico; pretty girls both, though one was evidently in the last stage of consumption, and wearing a big shawl pinned over her shabby cotton gown; while the other, whose short reddish hair curled over her head like a boy's, had on a broad-brimmed hat of blue felt, trimmed with gold braid, stuck on the back of her head, a smart cloth jacket, at least two sizes too small for her, but-

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toned over her exceedingly plump figure, and a pink necktie knotted loosely round her full white throat. She opened the door she had been leaning against as she spoke, and the other followed her into a small room, very dirty, stuffy, and boasting little more furniture than a wooden bedstead, a ragged horsehair arm-chair, and two smaller cane ones, a cupboard which contained the household supply of coals, provisions, and china, and a table covered with a litter of food, work materials, unwashed cups and plates.

Leaning against the window-frame, with one hand holding on to the dingy curtain as if for support, and her head resting upon it stood another girl, gazing languidly out over a labyrinth of dingy slates, tumble-down chimney-pots, and narrow courtyards filled with frowsy linen hanging out to dry, and squalling children, to the strip of pale blue sky visible beyond. A tall dark girl, with eyes large by nature and rendered larger by recent illness, and a quantity of rich black hair, which had partly fallen down from the twist in which it had been fastened, and hung in a loose mass against her sunken cheek and round her waist—Margaret Herne, in other words, though no one here knew her by that name.

"Look 'ere, Hester," said the curly-headed girl, going up to her and touching her on the shoulder, "Fanny says you've been talking an 'eap of nonsense. Now I ain't goin' to listen to a word of it, so shut up. Can't you be content where you are?"

The girl addressed turned slowly round.

"It isn't nonsense, Charlotte. Why shouldn't I go out and earn money like you if I can? And you said I could."

"Yes, when you're well enuff; but you ain't yet, so there's a hend of it. Look 'ere, I don't want to be rude, but you'll 'ave to get some flesh on afore you're the least good to my man as a model, or any other either, unless you want to set to Fildes or Lucas, and them as goes in for misery an' skillintons. *They* might

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take you on, but I don't know nothink about 'em; so I can't say even that for certain;" and the girl glanced, not without complacency: at her own buxom proportions, as if for proof that she had nothing to do with the skeleton line of business. Margaret heaved a long, weary sigh.

"I shall never get well or fat in this close room. It is the air that chokes me. I feel as if I were being stifled," she said, with an impatient push to the window-sash, which, however, was raised as high as it would go. Lottie Vanning looked offended.

"Close, do you call it? Well, I don't know that it's any closer than other rooms. There's only me an' Fanny sleeps in it; an' down below there's five in the front room, Mr. an' Mrs. Fosset, an' three children. I don't see as there's nothink stiflin' in this."

Margaret's eyes went back to the bit of sky, and a sudden vision rose before them of her room at the Croft, with the vines and monthly roses thrusting in their green tendrils and sweet pink blossoms at the latticed casement, and the long sweeps of golden cornfield and wind-swept down gay with purple heather, and fragrant with wild thyme, stretching away beyond. A sudden rush of tears came into her feverish eyes and she made no answer.

"I know what Hester means," said the elder girl, striking into the rescue. "It's comin' arter the 'orspital makes this place sort o' stuffy. I felt it myself the first days, an' she's a country girl, you see, an' 'ould feel the change more. They make those 'orspital wards so big an *hairy*, one seems as if it did one good to breathe in 'em."

"*You're* always jolly anxious to get out of 'em, I know, an' its difficult enough to get you in," retorted Charlotte sulkily. "I'm sure this last time I thought you'd ha' died afore ever I could get you to say you'd be took there."

"Yes, Lottie, but that was a'count o' leavin' you,"

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said the other gently, and Miss Charlotte Vanning pouted more.

"As if I couldn't take care on myself, an' with that there Will Starling lookin' arter me like an' old grandmother too! I tell you what, Fanny, I've a jolly mind sometimes to go off on the spree just because you're always crawk, crawk, crawkin' at me like an old crow; so just see if I don't some day, there now! There's Stretton has promised to take Horry Flamstead, that big girl as I told you 'ad been settin' for the nood to 'im this summer, to Brington for an 'oliday, an' she's quite cock o' the walk about it. What's to hinder me doin' like 'er?"

"Because you'd never see me nor Will again if you did, Lottie," Fanny Vanning said, kissing her sister, with a world of entreaty in her blue, shining eyes. "I'd be dead afore ever you came back; an' as for Will, 'e'ed never care to look in your face again, if it wasn't an honest one."

And then Charlotte Vanning, who was warm-hearted as well as well-tempered, suddenly relented and returned the kiss, declaring that Fanny was a cunning old fox, and knew how to come over her nicely.

"An' good gracious '*Eving!* do you know what time it is, an' that I'll get a deuce of a slangin' from old Matherson if I ain't there in a jiffey?" she added, running her fingers hastily through the fuzzy red mane on her forehead which the last little passage had somewhat disarranged. "Look 'ere, Hester, if you feels up to a walk, why don't you an' Fanny go up to the Park? You ain't got nothink to do (that dress o' mine can wait, Fan), an' you could set there a flit an' look at the swells. It'd do you no end o' good."

"Will you, Hester?" said Fanny, as her pretty sister bounced out of the room and went clattering down the stairs. "You're always thinkin' on the country, an' it's just like it. Leastways there's the green grass an' trees, you know; an' we can see 'ow the swell girls

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are dressed. I'd like to get a noo idea if I could for Lottie's 'panier,' an' it's not far."

"The Park?" repeated Margaret hesitatingly. "That is where ladies and gentlemen go to ride, isn't it? and others sit in long rows looking at them. I've heard Rob—my brother, talk of it, and—and others too. I would like to go there if it is green, but——"

"I'd stand the chairs, if you're thinking on that," said Fanny quickly. "They're a penny apiece, but that's nothing."

Margaret laughed.

"And we would be much better without them. What an idea to pay for sitting on chairs out-of-doors!" she said, thinking of the numberless times when she had rested on blossomy moors or grassy banks. "Can't we sit on the ground if we are tired? You are not afraid of damp, are you?"

"No," said Fanny, looking slightly shocked, much indeed as a Belgravian young lady from one of the wealthy squares hard by might have looked if it had been proposed to her to walk up Regent Street by herself, or take a second-class ticket in the Underground; "but none but the gutter children think o' settin about on the grass in the parks. I'd be ashamed to be seen doin' the like o' them, an' as I said, I'll stand the chairs, so put on your 'at an let's go."

But Margaret still hesitated.

"It was not the chair I was thinking about," she said. "I'd like *dreadfully* to go out in the air, Fanny; but don't crowds of people go there? *He* did, I know, and if he were in London and saw me. . . . I'm afraid to go. There are people I don't want to see me; and if I went they might. I'll stay here."

She had dropped wearily into the mangy old arm-chair as she spoke, a cloud of languor and despondency, heavier than had ever rested on her face in the old days, coming over it. Fanny looked at her with half-compassionate curiosity.

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"Come, that's nonsense," she said, laying her thin hand on the other's shoulder. "I don't know who you're afraid of—— Mind, you telled me you were an honest girl, or I'd never 'ave brought you 'ere on Lottie's count—but you don't know what a place Lunnon is, if you haven't lived in it. Why, you might go out a million million times an' not see the same people twice; an' as to the Park, it's empty enough out o' the season. Come along. You'll never get strong stived up 'ere, an' it'll do me good too. My breathin' was awful bad last night, though I didn't tell Lottie so."

And Margaret yielded and went. The longing to get away from houses and streets and under the shade of trees was as strong with her as with Ellice, too strong to be resisted; and though her dread of coming across Gerrant was more intense than her old craving to see him, she knew from the talk of the two models that daylight was too precious a thing in October to be wasted by artists in sauntering in the Park, an guessed that, if in London at all, Gerrant would be most likely to be in his studio. Of meeting with any of her own family she had no fear, not having seen the *Times* since she left home, and being in total ignorance both of how she was being sought after, and that Gordon and her brother were both within an hour's walk of her; so she put on her old straw hat and waterproof, and sallied out at Fanny's side, drawing many eyes on herself by the length of her stride and the way she had of holding her head high and turning it and her great defiant eyes from side to side, after the fashion of a newly-caught antelope from the Rocky Mountains.

"My! how folks do stare at us! Don't walk so fast, Hester; they'll think we've been up to summat wrong," Fanny said nervously. Lottie sometimes got "spoke to," and had chaffing offers of escort made to her, which she answered back with a repartee quick as it was pert; but people didn't open their eyes and

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stand and look after her as they c
guest of hers. What a queer-looking

Little enough did Fanny Vanning k
very truth. She had picked her up in
ward of St. George's Hospital, where M
pied the next bed to herself; and where
had often been before. The latter had
treacherous disease of which she was dyin[illegible] by sitting to an artist in a draughty studio and very light drapery through a bitter December day two years ago; and at times it gained such head that she must have succumbed to it if she had remained in the small, badly-warmed and worse-ventilated room in which she and Lottie slept and lived; so when her cough got so bad that she could not lie down at night, and the blood-spitting so frequent as to bring on faintness, she used to get an indoor ticket from a lady who was kind to her, and go off meekly to the "orspital" till medicine, and good food, and warmth had so far restored her as to enable her to return to the home of which her younger sister had now become the chief bread-winner.

The feverish misery of a pair of great black eyes in the bed next to hers first attracted her attention to their owner; and she learnt from the nurse that the patient was a girl called Esther Vaughan, and suffering from a severe attack of pleurisy, the result of exposure and a neglected cold. This nurse had a sister who let lodgings in a narrow street close to the Charing Cross station; and it was through her that Margaret had got admitted into the ward. She had taken a room at this woman's house on first arriving from France; had been taken ill there a few days later, and when her landlady found that the malady was likely to be serious, and that the invalid had no money to pay for doctors or medicine, or indeed to keep on her room for more than another week, she had insisted on either being allowed to send for the girl's relations, or to despatch her to a hospital without delay.

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"Margaret was suffering almost too much by then to care what became of her; but she accepted the latter alternative without a moment's delay; and her landlady, not an unkindly woman at bottom, bestirred herself so actively in the matter, that within twenty-four hours her lodger was comfortably established in the narrow white bed beside that occupied by Fanny Vanning in St. George's Hospital. This was all the nurse knew about her; and Fanny herself learnt little more, Margaret being the most uncommunicative of all the fellow-sufferers she had ever met. At first, indeed, the country girl believed that she was going to die; and had she done so it is certain that she would have died dumbly, and that nothing might have been known of her fate for years, if ever, by those most interested in it. But though the strength of her constitution asserted itself; and she not only lived but mended more rapidly than had been anticipated, she vouchsafed but little information about herself to any of her attendants. Even Fanny, whose gentle heart had been moved to pity by the too evident suffering and loneliness of her companion, received more than one savage rebuff in return for her compassionate advances and questions; and it is doubtful if she would have ventured on pursuing them of the accident of Lottie's coming to visit her one day, and by her voluble chatter enlightening all that end of the ward as to her own and her sister's profession, had not awakened Margaret's interest in the two. Fanny caught the fierce black eyes fixed on her in a kind of wistful inquiry several times after that; and responding generously to the unspoken appeal, soon got into conversation with her hitherto silent and churlish companion; telling her all about herself, her work and earnings, and gradually dragging out return them information that the girl to whom she was talking knew absolutely no one in London, had no home and no money; nor the slightest idea what to do with herself when she left the hospital. She had never been in London before, had

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been born in the country; and had only come from France a few days before she had been taken ill. What had she done in those days? Gone to a picture-gallery while it was light; and once walked down the Strand in the evening that she might see the outside of a theatre. She would have liked to have gone in; but there was such a crowd and they jostled her. No, she was not frightened, but it was very insolent of common, low men like that to go pushing against her, and she didn't like it. She had only five and sixpence left now; and she didn't suppose it would last her long. Did Fanny (this was asked very abruptly) think she could earn money by going out as model? She had sat to a painter before, and didn't mind that at all.

The question puzzled Fanny greatly, coming on what had preceded it. To have no friends and no money, and to spend your time in looking at picture-galleries and *objeet to being jostled!** Fanny herself was an orphan, with no outside relations except an old aunt, who kept a sugar-plum shop in some little country town in Somersetshire. Her father had been a model before her, and, having lost his wife early, had brought up the two children in his own trade; so that Lottie had been "sitting" ever since she was a mere baby. A risky and terrible trade for any girl in any city, perhaps the riskiest and most terrible that can well be found; but Vanning himself, though a harsh and sometimes brutal father, had always been a respectable man, and was determined that his daughters should be the same. His wife had been a pious Methodist woman, bringing her Sunday-school Bible and hymn-books with her when she came up to the great city to be a maid-of-all-work; and Fanny had taken after her so closely as not only to become a proverb for virtue and steadiness among her own set, but to act as a second mother in watching over and guiding her more thoughtless sister: and with so much success, that, though giddy and wilful as a kitten, and

* It was an anomaly altogether beyond comprehension.

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a very pretty kitten, Lottie had not merely maintained her respectability but was now in her eighteenth year, engaged to be married to the steadiest of young journeymen builders in Holborn; and was only waiting till they had "got on a bit more," to become a matron with a parlor and "chiney" of her own, and "not obligated to sit for no men to look at never no more, without it was 'er 'usband."

Still, with all this, poor Fanny had often very anxious days. Propriety and respectability were not easy for girls who, from the nature of their profession, were thrown among many of the lowest of their own sex, and the least scrupulous of the other, who went to music-halls and cheap theatres when they wanted a treat; and found their highest delight in a smart gown or a hot supper. Lottie didn't mind taking any amount of presents from such of her employers as were generous enough to give them, and now and then a kiss into the bargain; and words had arisen with Will Starling in consequence, and scenes between the lovers which filled Fanny's anxious soul with terror lest the marriage from which she hoped so much should be broken off; so that now, when she saw another girl even more alone than Lottie in having no sister, proposing to enter the same road with no knowledge of its perils, and, indeed, with what seemed to Fanny the most superhuman ignorance of every-day life altogether, the good girl's pity and interest for her increased, and she began to cast about in her mind as to how she could befriend her.

"What have you been?" she asked Margaret after that speech about the "jostling," which had filled her with almost more wonder than anything else. "You aren't a common girl like the rest on us. I can tell that by your way o' speakin" and your 'ands. You've never done nó work with *them*. An' you aren't free enough with your tongue for a shop-girl neither. 'Ave you been a teacher or a lady's-maid?"

"No," said Margaret shortly; "I've been nothing.

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I was taken care of—on a farm, and helped in the house; but that's all I've ever done."

"Why did you leave it, then?"

"Never mind. I wanted to leave. It was my own doing."

"An' wouldn't you go back if you could? It sounds like 'eaven to me. I can't fancy your leavin' of it," cried Fanny, her eyes full of wonder. "Couldn't you go back?"

"No; they—they would not have anything to say to me now, and I would not ask them. Let that alone, please. I thought you might be able to help me to some work like yours; I think I should do for that; but if you wouldn't like to——"

"Oh! but I would like," said Fanny warmly.

"You seem so terrible lonesome; an' as to a model, you're 'andsome enough to made a grand one an' I think I know a hartist, a good-natured old feller too, who'd .be glad to 'aye you: but it's awful tiring work a' times; an' you'd not be strong enough to go to it for good bit arter you're out o' 'ere."

"Can't I stay here till I *am* strong enough?" asked Margaret; but Fanny shook her head.

"See 'ere," she said, after a minute's pause. "I've got an idea inter my 'ead, but I must go over it a bit an' talk to Lottie fust. I'm goin' away to-morrer, you know, but I'll come an' see you till yer able to get out yerself; an' then may be we'll arrange something."

And according, when, after the lapse of a few days, she returned to pay Margaret a visit, she brought the idea with her and propounded it in a very few words.

It was simply this, that when Margaret left the hospital, she should go to them, sharing their rooms for nothing while she had nothing paying when she could pay; and staying on there with Fanny, if they liked one another well enough, after Lottie was married. I don't think Margaret at all appreciated the generosity of the proposal so simply made, or guessed that it would entail double work and no little self-sacrifice

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on her entertainers; but the poor are so used to helping one another that Fanny herself thought little of the matter, and only hesitated on another point, which, after Margaret had agreed to her proposal, she, with some hesitation, brought to light.

"There's one thing—" she said, "I don't think it of you; for you don't look nor talk like that sort; but then you comes from different parts to we, and I don't know nothink about you arter all. I *must* be careful o' Lottie, 'cos I promised father an' mother too I would be; and she's my own sister; an Will Starling trusts me to look arter 'er into the bargain. I'll 'elp you anyhow while you're weakly, don't be afraid o' my goin' back from that; but if you've come to this through getting into trouble—I mean," with the quaint, plain-spokenness of her order, "if you ain't been leadin' an honest life, I can't ask you to live on wi' Lottie, and there's the fac' of it."

"I don't know what you mean," cried Margaret, flushing haughtily. "You have no right to say such things to me; it is very impertinent——"

But Fanny interrupted her, not at all sharply:

"Well, well, don't be 'uffy. I took you to be honest an' I told you so; but you *are* queer, there's no denyin' of it; an' I thought it best to make sure. I do believe you wouldn't be un'ansome enough to deceive me when I've been fair an' candid with you; so if you'll come to us I'll know it's all square; an' you'll be right welcome."

And Margaret went to them as soon as she was able to be moved; and never another question was asked or doubt raised against her by either of the girls in whose home she found a shelter.

Yet it must have been a terrible experience to her, reared as she had been in all the comforts and decencies of home life at the Croft, this small, frowsy room, with a dark closet opening out of it, in which she slept (Lottie and Fanny had both offered their half of the bed instead, but Margaret had elected to take the

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closet in preference), and the companionship of these two girls of the people with an occasional visit from the washer-woman on the first-floor below, and more frequent ones from Will Starling, who was at present engaged on the erection of some new schools belonging to the little Roman Catholic church of St. Ethelberta in Holborn. The young man used to come in to drink tea with his sweetheart, sitting at the same table with Margaret, who shrank from him with equal haughtiness on Sundays, when in his smart blue satin tie, and redolent of yellow soap, he appeared to take Lottie for an outing, as on weekdays when he sat down with them in his plaster-covered jacket, pipe in mouth and warm from work. She never guessed—how should she?—that perhaps that very morning he had touched his hat to Gordon Maxwell, or exchanged a word with the latter about the building in course of erection, and Starling dreamt as little of any possible connection between Lottie's queer lodger and the tall young engineering gentleman who had always a civil sentence for the workmen; little thinking that one of them carried with him a clue to the girl he was searching for with heart and soul. A strange chance, indeed! one of those which an accidental word might break down at any moment; but Margaret never dreamt of saying it. She was eating out her heart in hungry yearning for the kindly parent-faces, the ivy-mantled walls, and pure, fresh breezes of the home of which she had once wearied, yet to which, thinking that she would be spurned from it, she had no thought of ever returning.

"They would rather know I was dead than see me back now," she said to herself in that strange ignorance of those belonging to her which her self-absorbed life had engendered: and yet there were days when she felt as though she could not endure her present surroundings any longer; and when only a recollection of the greater misery of those before she was taken to the hospital, those which came back to her now and

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then like a fevered nightmare, prevented her from flying from it, and taking her chance again in the wide world.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"NOW Ellice, you had better tell me all about it. You were in love with him and you quarreled, or the old people didn't approve of it, which was it. Come, be frank; for I've known all along that something was wrong, and I shall find out all about it as soon as he comes. You little, ridiculous thing, to think you could make-believe at being happy with that white face of yours! Why, my only doubt was as to whether it was this young Herne, or the dear good cousin who takes such paternal care of you."

The two Devereux girls had come in from their walk after that meeting with Robin, and Lyle had followed her cousin the latter's room and was speaking with her hand upon the latter's shoulders. She had tried a good deal of gentle chaff on their way from the gardens; but, instead of meeting or answering it Ellice had looked so genuinely distressed, and replied by such an imploring "Please don't now, Lyle," that the latter let her alone until they arrived at the house. Ellice had had time to recover by them, and she turned round and faced her courageously.

"Indeed, Lyle, you are wrong. I have never quarreled with Robin at all. We have always been great friends; and as for Gordon—I don't know what you mean! You know I haven't quarreled with him. He has never given me any cause."

"Nor Mr. Herne either, my child?"

"No Lyle, nor Mr. Herne either." It was not quite true, and she felt it; but certainly she had not quarreled with him, nor did she mean to do so.

"Then why were you so unkind to him, my dear?"

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"I did not mean to be so unkind. Was I?"

Lyle burst into a little silvery laugh.

"Were you! What, he is your guardian's son, you have been great friends and living in the same house for months; and yet when you meet you hardly give him your hand, and won't say a civil word to him, no, nor even second my politeness in asking him to come and see you. I really felt quite uncomfortable, he looked so wretched, poor fellow! and yet you say you haven't quarrelled!"

"I did not think he looked wretched, Lyle," said Ellice, coloring painfully. "You would not have him look very lively when his poor father is so ill, and . . . . and he may have other troubles as well."

"I think it's very likely he has other troubles my dear. What I wonder at is that, knowing them, you should be so unsympathetic. Why, you never even inquired after the father."

"Oh, Lyle! did I not?" but indeed in the pain and confusion of the meeting Ellice hardly knew what she had or had not said. "Surely you must be mistaken; but—but I was so taken by surprise; and he seemed in such a hurry to go. I should be very sorry if he thought I did not care about the dear old Squire."

"Only you don't want him to think you care for the dear young one! Ellice, Ellice, I never saw a girl blush like you do. Why, you dear little innocent, don't you know that the very way to prove that you do care for a man is to overact indifference to him as forcibly as you did to-day?"

Ellice blushed deeper yet. Was it so indeed? Lyle knew more of the world than she; and if right, how she must have betrayed herself. She made one more effort at self-defence.

"But I do care for him very much, Lyle. I should be very sorry to be indifferent to him when he has always been so good to me; only——"

"Only he wants something warmer in return for his

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goodness, is that it, Cousin Lisa? Then is Gordon really the favorite?"

"*Gordon!* Surely, Lyle, you are not going to tease me about him! Gordon, *my brother?*"

"He is not your brother really, my dear."

"He is exactly the same; and we love each other just as dearly as if he were one. I thought you understood that long ago."

"My dear little cousin, don't be angry. I was only joking."

"But please, Lyle, don't joke about Gordon in that way. It would never have entered into my head that any one *could.* Don't you know that he is going to be a priest, and wouldn't care about any woman? And even if he did, it would make no difference to me. *Me!* Why he is more severe with me than papa ever was. I cannot bear that such an idea should have even come into your head."

"Well, well, you needn't be so shocked, Lisa. As I said, he is not your brother really, so there was no harm in my idea. However, I see I was wrong, and Mr. Herne is the culprit after all. You are very mean not to take me into your confidence, however; and I warn you I intend to find out all about it."

"If you can," said Ellice, trying to laugh.

"I shall try. Wait till he comes this evening, little madam, and you'll see. Do you know, I was wanting something to amuse me. I am getting rather tired of talking 'church' with the good Gordon."

Ellice felt a little warm.

"I thought you were so much interested in all that sort of thing, Lyle. *He* thinks you are. He was saying only the other day that he liked talking to you because you were so thoughtful and earnest; and he does not care for women generally."

"Did he say so? But you are right, Lisa; those things do interest me." Lyle had made a slip and was anxious to retrieve it. She rather enjoyed the power of fascinating a woman-hater like Gordon Maxwell.

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If she could induce him to forget his prospective vows and fall regularly in love with her it would be something to boast: but that would never be if Ellice told him that she was only making game of him and his pet subjects. "Gordon is very superior to most young men," she said gravely. "You have not known him since you were children, or you would appreciate it as I do; but I see you take all my little jokes *au serieux* to-day, and I merely wanted to charm the soberness out of your face. I shall run away since you are so ungrateful:" and she did so: after which Ellice did feel grateful.

I don't think that the latter distrusted her cousin, or saw her as she was; but perhaps the kindred blood in them made her quicker to feel the artificiality without being aware of it, and she never felt as thoroughly sympathetic with her as she did with other people.

Her thoughts, now that Lyle was gone and she was left alone, were not happy ones. Often as she had pictured meeting Robin in the streets, and, indeed, when she first came to London she never went out without wondering and hoping if she would do so, the rencontre of to-day had taken her as completely by surprise as if she had last heard of him at the other side of the world. To be sure, since it had become plain to her that he did not care for her any more, her hope that she might meet him had been turned into a fear lest she should do so, and a sorrowful shrinking from the very thought of him; but that she should have shown this shrinking so unmistakably, that she should have lost her self-command so utterly as to deprive her of the power of speech, expose her to Lyle's shrewd guesses and perhaps make herself an object of compassion to the man himself, was something so exquisitely painful that the blushes, about which Lyle had laughed at her, came *burning* into her cheek at the thought of it, and brought the tears with them. What must he have thought of her? she asked herself, he who had sometimes vexed her by talking lightly of other girls,

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and the easy conquests men found them. *She* had been easy enough, in very truth; and now to have lost all dignity maidenliness as she had done, to stand like a statue, trembling and almost sick at the mere touch of his hand, forcing him to speak to her, and to accept Lyle's invitation when he had meant to pass her by through her utter want of self-command—oh! it was very grievous. For the more she thought of it the more she felt convinced that so far from meaning to come and see her of his own free will, it was only the accident of her recognising him which had prevented him from passing without even stopping to address her; and the conviction of this fact caused her a pang which lay far deeper than mere wounded pride or resentment. Robin was no scoundrel to amuse himself recklessly at an orphan girl's expense, nor to change to her as suddenly as he had done from mere fickleness. He must have some cause for his conduct; and what cause could there be unless he too believed in the cruel accusation of her being accessory to Margaret's misconduct? But surely, surely he who pretended to love her must have known her better; and, even if not, what right had he to judge her unheard and condemn her merely on the passionate suspicion of an old man struck down by illness before she had had time to refute his injustice? The Squire might and indeed must be forgiven on the score of the shock and anguish to him of Margaret's flight; but Robin, her lover, *he* should have known her better. It was different with him: and for the moment pride and a just anger got the better of her grief, and she made up her mind that if he came that evening she would not see him. It would be well for him to feel that she resented the slur cast on her by him and his family, and to recognise that she in her turn refused to receive those who had cast her off with such pitiless harshness.

But this resolve did not last long. It had occurred to her all of a sudden that Robin's fickleness might

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not be from his heart after all, but be simply owing to his having failed to obtain his parents' consent to their union; and this explanation brought a balm and soothing with it which only those who feel that true love implies veneration for its object could understand. If this were the case, she, of all women, would be the last to resent his obedience, or desire him to set himself against his father and mother, more especially when they were in such grievous trouble. Certainly he might have come or written to tell her so, instead of leaving her without word or sign as he had done; but perhaps he had not had courage for so painful a task, and had put it off in hopes of their relenting. Now that she thonght of it, she remembered Lyle's comments on the unhappy look in his face, and recalled the pained expression in his eyes when they had met hers with a quick contraction of her own heart. Poor fellow! if this were the truth, he might have been weak and wanting in resolution, but not wicked or heartless; and the least she could do was to help him by being as brave as she could, and by meeting him simply as a friend and as if she understood without words that all else was at an end between them. It would be very hard perhaps, but it would be for *his* sake, and his part must be hard too. God would certainly help her if she tried to do her best to soften it to him.

It was that thought which brought her on to her knees, and when she got up from them, the afternoon sun shining into her room, found a light in her face which owed its origin to no outward luminary. She was very pale still, and there was a look in her eyes as though she had come from the death-bed of one near and dear to her; but tears and weakness were gone, and she went downstairs and took her place with her aunt and cousin with so serene a manner, that Lyle was half deceived into wondering whether she had been mistaken in her morning's guess.

They were in the middle of the second course at

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dinner that evening when there came a double knock at the door, and the page who answered it returned to say that Mr. Herne was in the drawing-room. He begged the ladies would not disturb themselves, he would wait till they had finished; but Mrs. Devereux looked at Ellice, who despite all her resolution, had turned as white as a ghost, and said kindly:

"You have almost finished, haven't you my dear? Run up to your cousin, and don't mind waiting for us. I dare say he has plenty of messages from his people for you, and you can amuse him till Lyle and I come. Open the door for Miss Devereux, Tylon."

"Yes, Ellice, run up to him. I am sure you ought to do so after your cruelty this morning," said Lyle, in a laughing undertone, and with perhaps a trifle of malice in her mirth. She fancied that Ellice would, from mere shamefacedness, refuse to go; but though in truth the girl's inclination was to do so, she did not give away to it, but rose from her seat with a quiet dignity for which Lyle had not given her credit, and saying, "Thank you, Aunt Devereux. I will tell him you will come soon," left the room.

If, when on the friendly loneliness of the staircase without, she put her hands over her pale face and breathed one hasty prayer for strength and self-mastery, no one knew of it. The step with which she entered the drawing-room was as composed and her manner as kind and gentle as that with which any friend, knowing of the trouble Robin was in, could have come to greet him.

And he felt it so: felt it more cruelly than the coldness and almost incivility of her manner in the morning. *That* might have been agitation. This was the expression of her real sentiments after she had had time to recover herself, and as he resumed his seat and answered her questions about his father's health, he almost felt as if he were speaking to some stranger with Ellice's face and dress, and felt ready to curse his folly in having, without rhyme or reason, broken the

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resolution he had made, and hurried off in desperate haste to the very house he had determined that he would not enter. Well, all he could do now was to be a man, and meet her on her own ground. He need not stay many minutes.

"I did not ask after the Squire or your mother as I wished this morning," Ellice said, after her first inquiries, "because I was so much taken by surprise at meeting you, and—and I did not know how much to say. They only know here that my guardian is ill."

She blushed very much as she made this little explanation, and Robin colored too, partly because she did, and partly from annoyance that she should have to blush at the mention of any one connected with him.

"So much the better," he said shortly, and with a perversity which pained her. "I still hope that my poor, foolish sister may return to us; but of course it would be unpleasant to you even to allude to her among your relations now; and after all, silence is perhaps kindest."

Ellice's lip quivered at the insinuation, but though he only made it from soreness and a half hope that she would indignantly disclaim the feeling attributed to her, she said nothing, feeling that she could not trust her voice to defend herself, and that it was better he should think what he liked than for her to break down in the composure she found such a difficulty in maintaining. After a moment, however, she said gravely:

"I have not seen Gordon for two or three days. Have you heard *nothing* from Margaret since? I was in hopes when you said you were going down to the Croft to-morrow that you had some news to take them."

"Only this, that she is not with the man for whom she left us, nor has she been since they arrived at Dieppe. I traced them there; but though he went on

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to Paris, and afterwards passed through here and went to Brussels, she was not with him, and is not now."

"You have seen him then?"

"Not since I left Paris. I have vainly tried to do so, but the coward refused to meet or fight me; and though Maxwell, your cousin, went with me to his lodgings here and afterwards to Brussels that he might give him a message from me, the cur managed to elude us both times. I thought Maxwell might have mentioned as much to you?"

"No."

It was only one word and very gently spoken, but it had the effect of stopping Robin's mouth completely. The pure and tender sympathy in her eyes as she asked him after his lost sister had led him on to answer her as frankly as though she had been one of the family, or his wife; but his last words had caused the fair face he was looking at to change from white to red with startling rapidity, and the sight recalled him to himself.

"I beg your pardon," he said hastily, and flushing up with annoyance at his own forgetfulness, though indeed Ellice's change of color was only due to the thought of what might have been the result if Gerrant had consented to meet her lover. Robin might have been killed, might never have seen her again; and Gordon had tried to arrange it, had been in Brussels, and yet had never said a word to her on the subject.

I forgot that I ought not to talk to *you* of these matters," he went on irritably. "Your cousin had more discrimination, and I must ask you to forgive me. "I need not tell you that I did not mean any disrespect to your or——"

But Ellice stopped him, her large eyes looking at him, full of such grave dignity and innocence of all false shame or pharisaism as made him feel as if he could have stooped down and kissed her little white hands in reverence.

"*Disrespect!* How could you show me disrespect

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by answering what *I* asked you? Would you have me forget Margaret because she has done wrong and must be unhappy and in trouble? I think of her day and night. How can it hurt me to speak of her?"

"No, you are too pure and too good for it to hurt you," said Robin quickly; "but there are other good women who would fancy it did, and shut their ears against the mention of any one who had disgraced herself by running away, as our poor Maggie—God help her!—has done."

"Robin!" cried Ellice. Her eyes were swimming in tears at the sorrowful bitterness of his tone. She half rose from her seat with the impulse to go to and comfort him; but his eyes were on the ground and did not see the movement; and she had time to recollect herself and say in a calmer tone, "Do not be too anxious or disheartened about her. Perhaps when you get home you will find she has written to her mother; and, anyhow, remember you leave Gordon here; and if she should come to London he will be sure to find her. He knows the most out-of-the-way places, and he will do his best to help you. You may be sure of that."

She spoke very earnestly, hoping to cheer him; but the wretched misunderstanding between them made Robin misconstrue her warmth; and there was extra constraint in his manner as he answered, forcing himself to say what he felt was just, though with a cold formality which grated on Ellice.

"I do not know what we should have done without his assistance, as it is. It has been most generous of him, considering——" he stopped short and added abruptly, "But I shall return to town by the first train the day after to-morrow; and therefore shall not need to trouble him any more. It has been unfair to take up so much of his time already, when—when of course he would so much rather have given it to you." He took up his hat as he spoke. It was not in human nature to go on discussing his rival's merits, and Ellice

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could not expect it of him: besides, the painfulness of the interview and his proximity to the fragile sweetness of her small fair face was getting too much for him.

"I won't detain you any longer," he said huskily. "You will make my apologies to your relations for coming at such an hour; and—and I suppose I may give your love to my mother. She must be missing you very much."

"If you will," said Ellice quickly; "and tell her—oh! if I thought she *did* miss me——" her color changed. She was going to add, "I would not wait an hour before going back to her," when the recollection that if Mrs. Herne objected to her as a daughter-in-law her presence there could not but be undesired, came in time to check her; "but I do not think she does," she added instead. "She would rather I were away at present; and—and I dare say it is better."

She rose as she spoke. The restraint on her feelings was growing too horrible to be borne. In her dread of breaking down she almost wished that he would go quickly. "Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand, and Robin took the word as his dismissal.

"Good-bye," he repeated, his eyes and voice full of an angry passion which could no longer be controlled, "and God bless you, Ellice. I don't blame you for leaving us or changing your mind. He's a better fellow than I; and who but a selfish hound would want to tie you to a falling house. Don't think it churlish of me if you don't see me again, however; I love you so well that I can't bear it—I——"

He was standing before her, her hand in his, but turned suddenly away with a great choke in his voice. How it happened that the next moment Ellice was in his arms, held there tightly with her innocent lips pressed against his, which were raining passionate kisses on them, God, who knows what women's hearts are made of, could better tell.

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"Robin, Robin," cried the poor child, all her resolution broken down at last, "I never left you. I was sent away. It is not I who have changed. Oh! Robin, don't cry, don't please don't. I love you. Don't you *know* I love you better than all else?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

"I FANCIED, Lisa, that we were of one mind on this subject."

The pale October sunlight was falling through the elm-trees in Lord Holland's park, and striking the library window of No. 3, Phillimore Gardens, across Mrs. Devereux's little strip of garden. One long ray stooping on the fair head of a girl seated in the window, turned the flaxen locks to gold, and, traveling further, now lit, now left in shadow, on the stalwart figure of a young man pacing up and down the carpet in front of her with impatient strides. Without, the sparrows were chirping among the yellow sycamore leaves strewing the lawn: and the crimson leaves of the Virginian creeper made a fiery garland round the balcony and hung in flickering, ruby-colored tapestry to the ground. It was a sunny, peaceful, mellow-colored day in the open air; but peace was not the predominant charm in Mrs. Devereux's library at the moment; for Gordon was just hearing of his cousin's visit, and truth to say, was sorely displeased, and did not scruple to show it. That Ellice might have kept it to herself, had she been less open with him than she was, was a phase of the matter which he did not pause to contemplate. What vexed him was that it should have occurred at all, and that she should tell him of it, not with annoyance or regret, but with cheeks rosy with blushes, and eyes and lips tremulous with a happiness which he could not even understand, and which seemed to him strangely out of place.

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"I fancied that we were of one mind," he said severely, "and yet you tell me that he has been making love to you again, and that you—you *encouraged* him!"

And when Ellice was obliged to own that something of the sort had certainly occurred, the young man's brow darkened and an almost unhappy look came into his face. How was he to preserve this precious little adopted sister of his from the snares and perils about her if she herself took part against his efforts and slighted his counsels? He had made it a part of his lay-ministry to guard her from the contamination of the world; and if he failed even in that, how could he hope to succeed in the vocation to which he still aspired? Squire Herne's animadversions against her and his wife's tacit support of them had filled him with keener pain and indignation than the girl at whom they were directed. *She* was strengthened by a sense of her own innocence and her womanly sympathy with the trouble of those who suspected her; but to him it seemed horrible that even the taint of such a suspicion should have fallen on her head; and he had stood up stoutly in her defence and taken a pleasure in removing her from the house where she had been traduced. That she must suffer for it anyhow, he knew; and the more silently and gently she bore the suffering the more tenderly he felt towards her. Ellice, an exile from her guardian's house for honor and conscience' sake, and giving up love and such earthly pleasures rather than in any way wrong those who had wronged her, was a creature after his own heart, a soul walking straight along the thorny road to heaven, and worthy to receive the laurel crown at the finish; but Ellice, giving way to her lover's persuasions, yielding to a passion with which he had no sympathy, and which seemed to him mere weakness; and giving, by so doing, a color to all that her guardian had said of her, was something widely different, something to be blamed and mourned over; and it was this very thing that he had feared, this that he had tried to counter-

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act by dropping all mention of her lover; and doing his best that they should not be brought together.

Assuredly his feelings towards Robin Herne were not those of love at the present moment. It must be remembered that Gordon had, as yet, heard no explanation of the old Hernes' accusations, nor of Robin's seeming fickleness and want of courage and honesty. Lyle and her mother had come into the drawing-room almost immediately after those words of Ellice's, which had raised poor Robin from the depths of despondency to a heaven of joy and gratitude; and he had gone away shortly afterwards with a whispered promise to come again on the morrow and explain everything. Lyle's keen eyes, however, had seen enough to warrant her asking more, and Ellice, after all her poor little efforts to guard her secret, was obliged to confess that she did care for Robin Herne and he for her. They were not engaged, she explained with anxious care, and perhaps they never might be; for he had not even spoken to his parents as yet; so please, please would her cousin and Mrs. Devereux be so very kind and good as not to talk or tease her about it? The Hernes had had a great deal of trouble lately, and it was no time to be talking of such things. She was almost sorry that Robin had come to see her on that account.

But though she said so, and tried to feel as she said, Ellice knew in her heart that she was not sorry. How could she be when she knew that Robin loved her, and when the radiant joy in his face was still in her eyes, and her cheeks and hands rosy from the kisses he had lavished on them in his gratitude? Happiness is a very infectious thing, and at eighteen, however heavily the heart may have been crushed down, it has elasticity enough to spring up higher than ever again the moment the weight is removed. Robin's hurried whisper that it had all been a mistake, and he would tell her about it when he came next, was sufficient to set her mind at rest and send her to bed as blithe as a

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lark, and freer from anxious thought than she had been for weeks past. *He* had said that it would all be right now, and how could she doubt him?

But unfortunately the morrow was a bank-holiday; and that well-intentioned marplot, Gordon, taking advantage of it to look up his young cousin, whom he had not seen for some days, choose the unconventional hour of eleven in the morning for his visit, thus getting the start by several hours of Robin, who could not have committed such a breach of the *convenances* had he been even more in love than he was; and poor Ellice was soon brought down from her pinnacle of unthinking happiness, and made to feel not a little sorry and ashamed for having indulged in it at all. Gordon's demeanor indeed was so very quenching, that it was some comfort to her to reflect that she had told Lyle that she was not engaged and never might be; and it was no less so to her cousin when she said the same to him, adding sorrowfully:

"I had told Robin that I loved him when he was happy. I could not say the contrary now that he is in trouble; but that is all, Gordon, and surely there is no harm in that."

"No, if it could remain all; but I should think it great harm if on the strength of that you allowed him to draw you into a sort of engagement without his parents' full and free consent."

"But, Gordon, he would never dream of doing so. Why should you think it of either of us?" Ellice broke in warmly; but her cousin only made his little quieting gesture with one hand, and went on unmovedly.

"You must remember, that letting young Herne's own conduct alone, his parents have preferred a very serious accusation against you, and one which can only be disproved by Margaret herself. Until you have that proof I don't see how you can, consistently with decency and self-respect, ask them to receive you as a daughter, or allow their son to bind himself to you. Surely we must think the same on this point at least, Lisa."

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And when Ellice answered almost angrily that of course they did, and that if he doubted it she would give him her word that the avowal of yesterday should make no difference in her relations to Robin, he went away more content than he had hoped.

But the bloom of Ellice's newly-revived happiness was gone, rubbed off like the down from a butterfly's wing by a rude finger, and when Robin came, joyous and exultant, his visit was by no means as pleasant a one as he had expected.

He had pictured Ellice coming to meet him with smiling lips, and nestling into his arms while he told her how it came that he had ever doubted her. Instead, he found her shy and nervous, and even more constrained than on the previous day, though the agitation in her manner and the tenderness in voice and eye breaking at almost every moment through her enforced coldness might have consoled him if he had not been made too indignant to pay heed to it by learning that she did not mean to consider him as engaged to her, or to allow any explanations to shake her in repeating that whatever they might have been in the past, at present, and till Margaret was found, they were only friends—friends and nothing more.

"But, Ellice, surely that is unreasonable," cried Robin passionately. "I have told you how all the mistake arose, and you own I was not to blame. You accepted me a month ago; and though I was resigned to give you up when I thought you had changed your mind or preferred your cousin, now that you assure me that it is not so and own that you love me, I can't understand why you should put me away and refuse to let things remain as they were before. It is cruel to me, love."

"Oh! Robin, I don't want to be cruel to you," said Ellice tremulously. And then he took her hands in his and answered:

"Say you are mine, then; that you will be my wife as soon as I can make a home for you, and that no-

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thing and no one shall take you from me. Say it, Ellice, my own darling, and make me happy. I want a little happiness just now."

But hard as it was *not* to say it, and to deny him anything with his warm hands holding hers, and his loving eyes looking into her face for the answer she longed to give, Ellice shook her head,

"I cannot do it. Dear Robin, I would give anything to make you happy; but this would not be right —not until your parents have given their consent. They have only you now; and . . . . and, Robin, I *will* not marry you unless they wish it."

"But I tell you they will wish it. It was only that they thought Gordon——"

"Gordon!" interrupted Ellice, half laughing, and not blushing at all, to her lover's great satisfaction, at the idea. "So you have told me; but it seems too ridiculous that any one could possibly think such a thing of Gordon and me. And *you* to do it too!"

"After all, love, you gave me good cause by forever praising him up to the skies as you did; cousins do fall in love sometimes, little girl."

"Not cousins like we are. Don't say anything about it. I hope he will never hear that such a notion has ever entered any one's mind. Of course I praised him; he is my own dear brother, and you——"

"Yes, I? Why do you stop, Ellice? Go on; tell me what *I* am to you," cried Robin, making another effort to possess himself of the little hand; but this time Ellice kept him off, and answered:

"You are my best friend, Robin, and I am yours till Margaret is found, or your parents wish me to be something more."

Robin got angry again.

"We have not found a trace of her yet," he said. "It may be months before she chooses to let us know where she is. That is why I have not liked to trouble my parents with my affairs, but now——"

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"You will not! Oh, Robin, it would be horribly selfish, and surely we can wait."

"*Wait!* And for how long? I tell you what it is, Ellice, you might as well tell me to give it up altogether." And when Ellice, though with tears in her eyes, said she would rather do that than give the Squire or his mother cause to think any worse of her than they did already, Robin declared that she did not love him at all. It was her cousin who had put her up to this. She always minded *him*, and did what he bade her. After all, she cared for Gordon more than she did for any one else, or she would not let him rule her as he did; and as for himself (Robin) he wouldn't stand another man coming between him and the woman he loved, let him be brother, parson, or whatever he liked to be. . . . He went away very shortly after this in a frame of mind by no means enviable, and would have left the house, only Lyle, who happened to be coming upstairs as he was going down, insisted on his coming into the library to have a cup of five o'clock tea with her mother, greeting him with such winning cordiality that Robin could not be churlish enough to decline; and once inside the pretty little book-lined sanctum, flowers within and without, a cup of strong tea beside him, and a pretty, dark-eyed young woman regaling him with pleasant talk of the sort which makes a man pleased with himself and all about him, Robin felt the dark cloud over him gradually softening and fading away. By-and-by, Lyle slipped out of the room and returned with Ellice, the latter looking indeed as if she had been crying, but trying to smile, and so wistfully gentle in her manner towards himself, as though trying to make up for her cruelty, that the young man could not help feeling as if his case was not so desperate after all,and as if he somehow owed to Lyle the change in his sensations.

"It is awfully kind of you to make me so welcome here," he said to her at leaving. (Somehow people al-

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ways spoke as if it were *Lyle's* house, not Mrs. Devereux's.) "I'll try not to abuse your good-nature, but please give me a hint if I do; for yours is such a pleasant house, and a man only staying at a London hotel is so lonely, that I may trespass too often."

Lyle put out her hand to him smiling. She had very white, regular teeth, and many men, Robin included, thought her smile an uncommonly pleasant thing.

"I don't think you can do that, Mr. Herne. We are very glad to see you, or any friend of my cousin's." And she added in a lower voice: "She has told me about you: I hope you don't mind, for I wish you every success. Indeed, I don't understand what she hesitates about."

"I wish you would tell *her* so then," said Robin, reddening very much, as was natural, but trying to put a good face on it; and Lyle nodded in assent so cheerfully that when he went away he pronounced her a "very jolly sort of girl, no nonsense or affectation about her, and yet so feminine;" he only hoped she would be able to counteract that Maxwell's influnenee over his dear, scrupulous little Ellice.

But the days that followed were not encouraging to this hope. Ellice was obstinate in her refusal to look on him in any other light than a friend, or to allow him to "have it out with the old folks," as he styled it, quoting Gordon as to the unsuitability of forcing such matter on their attention till Margaret was found; and the end of it was, that instead of going down to the Croft, he remained dawdling on in London, persuading himself that he was carrying on the search for his sister, but really haunting the Devereuxs' house, and trying to tire out Ellice's resolution by the effect of his continual presence. Gordon on his part objected strongly to this; called it taking advantage of his cousin's orphanhood and her friends' hospitality, talked about "ungentlemanly persecution," and seized an early opportunity for reminding Ellice of her desire

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to leave the Devereuxs, and urging on her his scheme of the *creche*. Mrs. Winstanely, the lady who had given up her house and time to this labor of love, was greatly in need of a young lady to assist her; and though a member of the Church of England herself, she was a cousin of Father Bertram's, and would give a warm welcome to any one recommended by him. Ellice would find it a peaceful and useful home, and could stay there as long as she liked; all of which was very true, and yet Ellice hesitated, and asked him if he could not wait a little. She would rather not decide just yet. The fact was, she knew very well that Robin would look on such a step as a tacit expression of her indifference to himself, and a severing of the last link between them. He would think she did not love him, and would be cruelly wounded. Even as it was, he was angry and dissatisfied with her; and to rouse Gordon's displeasure into the bargain, as she was doing by her irresolution, was very hard. She did not know how to please, either, and grew whiter and thinner daily from distress of mind.

If at this time she had had any woman friend to advise or help her, it would have been a great comfort to the young girl in her perplexity; but Mrs. Devereux, wrapped up in fat, contented selfishness, was the last person in the world to whom she could have spoken on any subject involving her deeper thoughts and feelings; and Lyle, to whom she did speak—well, Lyle was a mystery, and not easy to understand. She was very fond of drawing Ellice out on the subject, and discussing it in a pleasant, sympathetic way, which somehow made the poor child feel as if her cousin thought the whole affair very slight. Lyle talked as if she thought her quite right to hold out against Robin, said men were always selfish and unreasonable; but there was no need to worry one's self about their whims and humors. He would come round by-and-by, and she was much wiser to go by Gordon's judgment, whatever it was, as being more impartial. Mrs. Herne

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would value her all the more afterwards for not being too easy. Now all of this was very soothing to Ellice at the time, and coming from a girl used to the ways of the world, and more than four years her senior, carried a weight with it which strengthened her in her course; but why, if Lyle thought thus, should she so often bring up the subject of generous uncalculating devotion when Robin was present, and the nobleness of sacrificing all secondary interests and worldly considerations for those one really loves? Robin used to warmly acquiesce in these opinions and Mrs Devereux to differ, saying Lyle was a foolish girl, and that she hoped she wouldn't carry out her theories herself; and a discussion used to ensue, which seemed to Ellice like a sort of tacit condemnation of her own prudence and coldness, although Lyle used to assure her afterwards that nothing that was said had the smallest reference to *her*, and that she didn't know how the subject had cropped up, for of course the cases were entirely different, etc. But if so, why was Robin always having half-whispered conversations with the elder Miss Devereux at present; and why did he always come away from them more hurt and angry with herself than he had been before? Ellice could not understand it at all. Surely it was enough that Lyle should nearly always manage to absorb Gordon when he came, and talk to him about churches and schools, etc., till she had imbued him with the idea that only her devotion to her worldly old mother prevented her becoming a sister of mercy on the spot. It was in the midst of all this perturbation and trouble and jealousy that Robin received a letter from his mother containing tidings of importance.

She had news of Margaret, and wanted him to come down to Hernecroft at once!

The girl had not written to her mother, but a note in her handwriting had arrived at the Croft for Ellice, and Mrs. Herne had opened it, thinking, she said, that as she knew it was from her missing child, she might

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be excused for doing so. It was only a few lines, without date or heading, to say that she was alive and quite well and safe. Some one had told her that if people were thought to be dead it made great trouble sometimes, and she did not want her parents to have any more worry on her account. She hoped they were being well taken care of, and she would never bother them any more. She knew they couldn't forgive her for running away, and would never want to see her again.

Mrs. Herne did not enclose the letter. She said "father" wouldn't let it out of his sight, so Robin must come straight down and see it. They had tried to make out the postmark, but it was almost obliterated, and of course they could not show it to any one else. Perhaps his eyes would be more successful.

Robin came to the Devereuxs' house with this in his pocket, and in a great state of excitement. He was going off by the next train, and wanted to persuade Ellice to let him take advantage of this long-looked-for scrap of news to tell his parents of his love for her. He great argument hitherto had been, "How can you talk of such things, or want to trouble them with them when we do not even know whether poor Margaret is alive or dead!" and now that this doubt was at rest he hoped to vanquish her other scruples. It was, therefore, a great disappointment to find that Ellice was out, and he showed it so plainly in his face and voice, that Lyle, who was at home, persuaded him to come in and wait her return; and seemed so gentle and sympathetic that he soon found himself confiding his object in coming to her, and receiving warm assurances of her hopes for his success.

"She really *must* not trifle with you any longer," Lyle said. "I will tell her so, as indeed I did when she misled poor young Mr. Elmslie, a friend of ours, by her manner. Ellice is a dear little thing, and likes to be admired; but sometimes I do not understand how

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she can coquette with people as she does. It does not seem true or—womanly. But then I forgot, she is not English, and every one says American girls are not *quite* like we are."

"Who is Mr. Elmslie?" said Robin. "I never heard of him before, and I don't think Ellice means to coquette with me. It is that Maxwell—I am sure I wish English girls *were* more like her." And then he remembered himself, and added politely. "But there are not many like you. I don't know how to thank you for all your goodness."

"It doesn't deserve thanks," said Lyle, as sweetly as if she didn't understand the addenda. "I think I like being 'good' to you, Mr. Herne," and Robin took up her hand and kissed it?

"You are an angel," he said impetuously. "Can't you make *her* like it too?"

There was a light rustle at the door of the ante-room, so slight that Lyle, who heard it, did not turn her head, or she might have seen Ellice's face, paler than ordinary, just disappearing from view. She had come upstairs from her walk, and had reached the door of the ante-room just in time to see the kiss given, and hear the first four words which accompanied it. For one second the ground seemed to heave under her, and she felt as if she were going to faint, so terrible was the idea suggested by the scene thus suddenly presented to her. Almost in the same breath, however, she recovered herself. Pride and wounded delicacy came to her aid, and without a word she glided noiselessly away and sought the shelter of her own room.

Utterly unconscious of the witness to his little bit of sentiment, Robin stayed another ten minutes in the hope of seeing his truant sweetheart before leaving. He had delayed till the last moment consistent with catching his train; and Lyle was so tenderly commiserative of his disappointment that she came out on the stairs with him to say good-bye. The servant,

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who was going to open the door, heard her last words, and looked up at her in surprise.

"I beg your pardon, miss, but Miss Ellice *is* in. I let her in myself a quarter of an hour ago, and told her Mr. Herne was in the drawing-room. I thought she had gone up to you."

"Ellice *in!*" repeated Lyle. "Are you sure, Tylon? Mr. Herne, she *cannot* have understood that you were here."

"Oh yes, miss, for she asked me in which room," said the boy; and Lyle murmured:

"It is incomprehensible. Can she have meant it for a joke?"

Robin had turned very white.

"It doesn't matter," he said hoarsely. "I suppose she didn't care to see me. Thank *you* all the same, and good-bye. I shall miss my train if I delay;" and then he was gone, and Lyle went serenely back to her morning's practising. She was not sorry that Ellice had not made her appearance, but she herself had nothing to do with that, and would probably hear the explanation when she next saw her cousin, and have the pleasure of telling her that Robin had come to say good-bye before leaving town, and how pleasant and conversational he had been.

But when the dining-room bell summoned them all to lunch, Ellice among the rest, there was something about the girl which puzzled her cousin. Her face was perfectly colorless, and there were dark lines under her eyes, but her manner was as calm and cheerful as possible, and when told that she had missed seeing Mr. Herne before he went off to Downshire, she only answered:

"Ah, he is gone then?" so coolly, that Lyle did not feel encouraged to tease her, and went on instead.

"He waited some time in the hope of seeing you, but was afraid of missing his train at last. They wanted him at home on some family business."

"I hope he was in time," said Ellice quietly. "It

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was kind of him to wait." And then she turned to Mrs. Devereux with some comment on their morning's shopping, which started the matron off on a dress discussion. Lyle did not understand her at all.

But that night Gordon received the following note:

"DEAREST GORDON, 3, PHILLIMORE GARDENS.

"You were quite right about the *creche*. I think I should be much better there, and only wish to get it settled as soon as possible. I do not think my guardian could object. If he does I can leave it again. Will you therefore see Mrs. Winstanley for me, or, as to-morrow is a half holiday, take me to call on her. I think she will find me useful. At any rate I will do my best that she shall. Don't delay about it, dear brother.

Your loving ELLICE."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

UNEXPECTED letters seemed in fashion about this time, for the day after Robin's departure one in a woman's hand arrived at his club for him, and might have lain there till his return but for an accident.

His visit had been fruitless in one sense, for no amount of examination could make more of the postmark than that the last syllables were "——hampton." What then before was too faint to be legible, and as Margaret had given no clue to her whereabouts in the interior, it might be Littlehampton, Southampton, or any other town ending in those letters with equal likelihood. As a matter of fact it was Roehampton, Tom Starling having a job at that place, and having been trusted to post it there; but no one could guess that and Robin was almost as much irritated as disappointed at the worthlessness of the clue from

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which he had hoped so much. But it was not worthless to the old people. To know that Margaret was alive and "quite *safe* and well"—the poor mother repeated the words over and over again with ever freshly flowing tears of thankfulness—was the next best thing to hearing that she was found; while the Squire, pillowed up in the armchair to which he was now able to be moved, and holding the letter fast in his shaking hand, said, looking up with a wistful humbleness which was infinitely touching:

"Robin, I must ha' been gruesomely harsh to my lass fur her to fear me so. '*Couldn't forgive her*'! Why, lad, she's but to come here an' lay her head upon my knees, an' never an' word o' anger should she hear from that day forrard. Surely thou'lt be able to fin' her now, Rob; surely thou wilt?"

And Robin could but promise that he would try his best, and feel rather conscience-stricken at the thought that since his meeting with Ellice his efforts in that direction had certainly relaxed. It was a comfort then to recollect that it was not so with that grim, meddling fellow, Gordon Maxwell, who from the first had taken up to the matter as if it had been his own sister he was seeking, and spent many of his evenings prowling about the embankment and bridges, and making inquiries in all sorts of places, likely and unlikely, where he thought Margaret's errant feet might have wandered. Once he had caught sight of Gerrant in the crowd coming out of a theatre, so he knew the latter was in London: but the artist had not returned to his old quarters, and neither Gordon nor Robin knew where he was to be found.

The latter stayed two or three days at the Croft. His presence did his father good, and Mrs. Herne urged him to remain as long as he could. A fresh advertisement had been put in the *Times*, and Robin telegraphed to his club for any letters which might have come for him there, on the chance that Margaret might also have written to him at that address.

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It was owing to this latter thought that on the following day he received the epistle to which I have alluded, and which was so important in its contents as to take him back to London as fast as the next train could carry him.

It ran as follows:

"I saw you in the street the other day, and overheard your conversation with a young man you called Maxwell. It seems that you are still seeking for the girl about whom you spoke to me in the train going to Paris. You may therefore like to know that she is in London and *not* with Gerrant. He saw her in the Park yesterday, and has been trying to find out her address since. Perhaps he has done so by now. I hope not, so write this to let you know. A line to the Post-office, Edward's Terrace, Kensington, will find me if you want further information. In return promise me that, should you recover her, you will take her safely out of his reach.

Your Friend and Fellow-Traveler."

The very idea of Margaret being exposed to fresh perils was enough to make Robin feverishly anxious to be gone; and it will be easily believed that his parents did not try to detain him. He had, however, to wait a couple of hours for a train, and during that time something was said of Ellice, who had not been previously mentioned. Robin's feelings had indeed been too sore and hurt at her late conduct to allow him to allude to her, and he had meant to go away without doing so, when Mrs. Herne said:

"It was a strange thing that Maggie's letter should ha' been written to Ellice, Robbie, wasn't it? Even if she were afraid o' our anger, there was *you*."

"Yes, but I might have been away from home," said Robin; "and of course she took it for granted that Ellice was here taking care of you, and being taken care of, as she should have been. I think it was very natural."

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"Ah! she didn't guess as Ellice were a deal more comfortable with her fine London relations than lookin' arter a poor old man an' woman like us," said Mrs. Herne sighing, and Robin felt himself grow suddenly warm and indignant.

"You forget, mother, that you sent her away, and she frets terribly about it, and is not at all more comfortable. I think you would be sorry to see how pale her face has grown. Maxwell says it is London air; but she looks really ill."

"Pale an' ill, does she?" cried Mrs. Herne quickly. "Why, what ails the child? Brother Harry would never forgive me if she were to go an' get sick; an' her mother was al'ays delicate. But 'twasn't *I* sent her away Robbie. She wanted to go wi' Gordon, or he wanted her wi' him. 'Tis all one with them, you know."

"No, I don't know," said Robin shortly; "and if you mean that you still think they are in love with one another, you're quite wrong, mother. That was all a mistake, beginning in my own jealous folly; and I should have come or written to you to set it right with you before now, only she wouldn't have you troubled about her when you had so much on your mind already."

"But, Robbie boy, I don't know what you mean. I thought we all knew as Gordon an' Maid Ellice were sweethearts. Why, there's no mortal she's so fond of. You must ha' heard her speak up o' her love for him yourself, though she never would say as they were engaged."

"Because they were not. She was brought up with him from a baby, and loves him like a brother; worships him, in fact, as lots of little sisters do their big brothers. She did not even understand that we had given a different color to her affection for him till I told her, and then she would hardly believe me, it seemed so absurd to her. Besides, it seems the fellow has been intended for the Church ever since he was a baby, and is only waiting to be ordained now till Uncle

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Harry gives his consent; and in his church the parsons don't marry, so Ellice would as soon have thought of falling in love with her grandfather or the Patriarch of Venice. She seemed to think there was something positively wrong in the idea."

"Then I don't," said Mrs. Herne, whose face looked utterly bewildered. "I don't say curates ought to go marryin' off in the way they do, an' gettin' a dozen children out o' hand wi' nothing to feed 'em on; but there's no man wants a wife like a parson, when he *can* keep one, ae' just see how the girls al'ays set their caps at 'em! It seems something selfish an' unsociable like for a man to have a house o' his own an' not ask a woman to share it wi' him, an' when there's such a lot o' girls goin' a beggin' too. Besides it stands to natur', a man can't keep himself tidy, an' a parson ought to look clean an' well set up . . . . But, Robin, surely you're mistaken, lad, for when we spoke to her about it she never said it wasn't so, or that she only cared for him like a brother; but cried, an' begged us not to set ourselves again her, for 'twas only settled that day, an' she hadn't thought we'd be vexed, but the couldn't tell us sooner; while he—why, he just flew out at what he called our misjudgin' her, an' took her away wi' him at though she'd been his wife already."

Robin's face showed a good deal of emotion. The image of poor little Ellice crying and pleading for her love to himself, the love which he had begged her to keep in her own heart, but which she was too true to deny, made him feel anything but comfortable.

"I am sorry *I* was not here at the time you speak of," he said, with a great effort at calmness. "Mother dear, it is very simple and easy to explain, for it has been a mistake on both sides. She—they both thought you were alluding to some one else, some one who *did* care for Ellice in the way you attributed to Maxwell, and who had only told her so that very day. She was too loyal to him to disown him, but it was cruel and

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unjust to expect her, a shy girl, to stand up and say before three people, all equally unjust to her, what it was the other man's part to say for her."

"And why didn't he then?" cried Mrs. Herne beginning to look unhappy. "God knows I never meant to be hard on the lassie, or unjust either. Wasn't she gettin, like one o' my own to me, an' I like a mother to her every way? 'Twas *that* made feel me sore at her shuttin' up her confidence again me about Gordon; an' mind, Robin, 'twas thee put that into my head an' no one else. How was I to tell o' any other lover, an' she seein' scarce a man i' these parts, wi'out you mean the curate, an' he's a poor, half-starved body, nigh as bad as a Romanist himself, an' seems to think as stomachs wasn't made to put food in, nor women for good men's wives. . . . But there! I could ha' vowed there was no one for Maggie—poor lost lamb! to come across, an' she found some one. Well now, the poor Ellice-child! I *am* grieved, for I mind the way she looked from father to me bewildered like when he was speakin' his mind to her, an' then hid her pretty face on nephew Gordon's arm as if she'd no one but him to stand by her; an' I so anxious about Maggie, I was only worritted by them. Do 'ee think I ought to ha' thought more o' her, Robin lovey? Surely it's loth I'd be to be harsh to any one, an' least o' all to a wee lass like that; but then came Maggie—*our* child's letter, an' poor father's stroke, an' it all seemed so bad wi' her knowing about Maggie's lover, an' hushin' up her own affairs, I was fare glad, an' I own it, when she willed o' herself to go away."

"And it cut her to the heart to know that you were. She never would have gone otherwise," cried Robin indignantly. "Mother, will you believe me, Ellice was as innocent with regard to Margaret as about the other matter. She would have given anything to have stayed with you, and been a comfort to you; but you wanted to be rid of her, and she could not force herself upon you. She could only go away

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with the one person left her, and trust to time clearing her with you. Poor darling! I tell you I feel utterly ashamed when I think of it. Margaret has all of us to stand up for her, but *she* had no father to rage on her account, or mother to cling to. She was left to our care, and we turned her off to seek the kindness from strangers which she had a right to have found with us."

In his strong excitement, and with the depths of his love stirred up to red heat by the force of his own words, Robin forgot himself, and spoke more harshly than he meant. The next minute he was bitterly sorry for it, and was on his knees by his mother, hugging her, and trying to comfort her, for she had turned from him and broken out crying, with her face hidden in her hands.

"Mother, mother, forgive me! I didn't mean to hurt you. Forgive me," he said, kissing her plump, work-worn hands again and again in his penitence. By-and-by Mrs. Herne found voice to speak.:

"Nay, lad, I'm not angered wi' thee. Maybe thou dost but speak the truth, only I never thought o' it i' that way, an it cut me that my own son should speak so bitter to his mother, an' she not have a word to say; for seems to me, Robin, we ha' wronged the child as was left to us, an' yet the Lord knows we never meant it. Many's time I've missed the pretty face an' blithe ways o' her since she left, an' wondered to think how she got so tangled roun' my heart the short time she'd been wi' us; and even father, for all he's so set again' her, had got so usened to her ways o' brighten-in' the house wi' her pretty work an flowers (as poor Maggie never seemed to think of) an' her readin' aloud to him—for my eyes aren't as young as they were, Robbie, and I can't read off smooth an' slippy like she did—that I know he felt it too. But 'twasn't me proposed that she should go, lad, don't 'ee say that. 'Twas Gordon for her; an' why did he, if she wasn't willing? Surely it would ha' been as easy for him to

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ha' told me all this, instead of bouncing off wi' her; an' indeed, I thought it wasn't kind o' her to be wishful to go when, if she'd stayed, we could ha' talked over any little difference we'd had arter the master was out o' danger, an' had it all made clear."

"Of course you could. It was all Gordon's fault," cried Robin, not sorry to find some one on whom the blame might be fairly laid; "and just like his blundering, meddlesome ways. Of course he ought to have found out where the mistake lay, and explained it to you, so that you might have seen that Ellice had done nothing but what was good, and innocent instead of taking up the matter in an overstrained, monkish light, scolding her, poor child! and carrying her off because he didn't think it honorable, forsooth, for her to stay after what you had said. No one but the little angel she is would have yielded to him and gone away as meekly as she did; but she never dreamt of resisting him, and he——Well, I won't say anything against him," said Robin, checking himself magnanimously: "for though he doesn't like me, I can't say he has had much cause to do so; and I believe he does care for her, and meant to do right. It was an egregious bit of folly, and has been the cause of all this misunderstanding; but what can you expect from a sucking parson, with his head always in heaven or the black slums!" and the young man brought his hand down his mothers's knee with an energy which he hardly intended. Mrs. Herne stooped down and looked him curiously in the face.

"Robin," she said a little tremulously, "I don't understand yet. What do you mean by Gordon thinking it more honorable for Ellice to go an' not having cause to like you? An' who *does* she care for? To hear you 'twould seem as if—but don't 'ee laugh at the old mother, boy, for her head's not so clear as it was awhile back—as if *you* cared for *her* more than ordinary way."

"And so I do, mother," said Robin, with a great

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gulp. It had come at last, and it was wonderful how nervous he felt. "I care for Ellice as men care for their wives, and I hope with all my heart that she will be mine as soon as I can make a home for her."

"Oh! Robbie, Robbie, don't 'ee say that!"

"But why not, mother? Nay then, mammy, dear old mammy, don't cover up your face again!" cried Robin, coaxing her. "Why shouldn't I love Ellice? Don't you own that you do? And isn't she as sweet and loving as a girl can be? Why, I've cared for her ever since she came here; and only for my absurd fancy about Gordon I should have told her as long before I did. See now, don't look grave and shake your head, and I'll tell you how it was." And having now got well under weigh, Robin told his story easily enough, ending with, "That is why, when she thought you did not approve of it, that she let him take her away. He was bent on carrying her off before I returned that you mightn't say she was encouraging me against your will; and of course I was awfully cut up when I found her gone. I found out all about it when I saw her in London, and I would have told you then, only she, in her unselfishness, wouldn't let you be plagued about her till Margaret was found and her name cleared. No, nor even let me keep to my engagement to her," cried the young man as proudly as if he had not quarreled desperately with Ellice on that very score. "She has put you first in everything, mother, and now surely you can't be vexed with her any longer. You've often said she was like a second daughter to you. Could you want a sweeter one, and when she will make me so happy too. . . . There! I hear the horse coming round and I must go. Don't cry, dear old lady; I'm not asking you to agree to anything *now*. I know it's no time for such things, or for troubling father; and if it were, I couldn't afford to marry till I've got a profession; but now that you know the whole truth, give me your blessing, at least, and

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something to say to her. Think how she has suffered all this time."

"God bless you both, children," said poor Mrs. Herne, kissing her son repeatedly before he stood up to go. "I fear me the child 'll never like me again now; but give her my love, Robbie, an' ask her to forgive me for bein' unjust to her, poor little maid! I can't say more now, dearie, an' you mun be patient; but God grant we may have Maggie back wi' us ere long, an' *then*——"

And with this hope Robin mounted his horse and rode away more cheerfully than he had expected. He knew the battle was as good as won, and he too hoped to be able to find his sister now through the aid of the mysterious woman who had already assisted him.

It is time now to return to that sister herself.

Margaret had gone for two or three days to the Park before Gerrant saw and recognised her; not to see the people, nor the riders in the Row, though to her unaccustomed eyes there seemed countless numbers of them, and poor Fanny took no little pleasure in contemplating the glossy horses curvetting to and fro, and scattering the damp brown earth in showers behind their heels; and the gay dresses of the real ladies and the "shady ones," as she termed it, who paced up and down, or rolled along in high phaetons or luxurious barouches.

"I al'ays looks to the shady ones for dresses," she said to Margaret. "Bless you! it's as easy to tell 'em as chalk from cheese. Look at their 'air an' jools, an' the way they swings about as if the gorgeousset gowns weren't nothink but dirt to 'em. But I've seen some as was the gorgeousest come to rags, an' glad o' a cup of coffee at a stall; an' I've pinted 'em out to Lottie too as a morial not to go arter the ways o' sich like. Took that un for a duchess, did you! Lor, dear, you don't know nothink o' life. Why, wi' all her grandger an' kerridge, an' lap-dog, she don't valley the 'alf of a

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decent girl like me, an' there ain't an old charwoman in our street as wouldn't tell 'er so any day."

Margaret shivered slightly, and turned away. It was not these she wanted to looked to look at, not the jewels, or dresses, or fine carriages. These things she had coveted both to see and own once. Now, they seemed like apples of Sodom, dust and ashes, in her mouth, and all she wanted was to get out of the crowd and roll and noise and into the quite shade of Kensington Gardens, where she could sit down on the fading, leaf-strewn grass, and leaning her back against a tree, try, with closed eyes, to fancy that she was back in her own country home, and that if she opened them she would see the autumn violets thrusting up their small blue faces between the fallen leaves; and the brown moors barred and laced with golden gorse, sloping away beneath her feet into the blue, hazy distance. Oh! to be back there, to breathe the fragrant air for one moment, to hear her mother prattling in her pleasant Downshire dialect to the hens and chick-a-bidies in the farmyard, and go black-berrying among the tangled bushes in the copse below Hardleigh Mill. . . . What would she not give for it now! And she had gone away and left it all of her own accord!

Sometimes she felt as if she must have been mad, or as if she were mad now, and these narrow streets, this smothering air and hideous noise, and the vulgar, coarsely spoken girls her associates, only the figments of a fevered brain; but whenever the idea came to her to break from them and find her way to a railway station, whence she could persuade the porters to send her back, somehow, anyhow to her native home, then too arose the conviction that her exile was not only real but binding. She *could* not go back now, back to the place where probably the story of her flight was still buzzed about as a choice bit of gossip in the village, where the vicar's wife was shaking her head over her in hopeless condemnation, and Miss Pelter shrugging up her skinny little shoulders, and whispering the last

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rumor going in italicised interjections; back to the house where she could never hope to meet her mother's smile again, where Ellice, fair, pure-minded Ellice would shrink away from her, and Robin look down at her in disdain; where—O God! it might be—she might find awaiting her her father's curse.

Her father! Often as the several home-pictures rose before her mind she hardly ever dared to think of him whom, in her silent, wayward heart, she loved best of all; or if his grey head and rugged brow rose before her, she shut her eyes shudderingly, or sprang up and tried by talking and movement to drive away the vision again. Too well she knew his opinion of conduct like hers, and his high ideal of Saxon maids and matrons, to believe that he would ever consent to look upon her again, or stretch out his hand to her in pardon. No, there was only one of all her kinsfolk whom she would have trusted to give her grace or kindness now, one whom she had hardly seen or spoken to, and whose few words to her had been sharp and rebuking, the tall big-boned young man whose presence in the hall had prevented her slipping out to seek Gerrant in the early September morning.

"I remember his eyes now," she thought, "blue, and looking straight into mine as if he knew where I was going, and wanted to hold me back. Ellice used to tire me talking about him, and of how in London he goes about visiting all manner of low, God-forsaken people, and likes them better than ladies and gentlemen. I don't think *he'd* turn away from me. Well, if I get ill again, and am like to die, I'll try to find him out, and ask him to get them to forgive me when I am gone."

"Hester, the ground's soakin' damp, an' I've loads to do at home; 'adn't we better be movin'?" Fanny used to say, at intervals breaking into her companion's musings, till the latter rose with an impatient shake of her shoulders and turned her face southward. She was not very pleasant or sociable to poor Fanny,

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though in her heart she felt kindly and gratefully to her; but Lottie, with her loudness and chaff, and childish vanity, she positively disliked, and sometimes showed it so plainly that Fanny felt uncomfortable about it, and rather as if she had brought a fierce young hawk into her hen-coop, who might at any moment pounce on and rend the pet chicken, and who now occupied the family perch, glooming down on them with ruffled feathers and arched neck. Poor hawk! if Fanny had only known of its antecedents, and how revolting all the details of Margaret's present life seemed to her, the narrow, noisy, smelling street, the close, frowsy room where they eat and slept and lived, the dingy, rat-haunted closet with the roof sloping down over her face, and nothing but a flock mattress on the floor for a bed, the staircase swarming with filthy children, the loud voices and coarse language, and low, imbruted lives daily brought under her eyes and ears—if Fanny could only have known the sickening repulsion which these things inspired in one so differently reared from herself and her sister as their stranger guest, she might have pitied too much to blame her; but Margaret's sombre uncommunicativeness shut out all sympathy from her, and Fanny privately put her down as rather touched in the upper story.

"Poor girl! I do b'lieve as she ain't quite 'countable," she said, when Lottie complained that "Hester's gloomy manner and short answers made her a regular wet blanket in the house, and Tom said he 'adn't no pleasure in coming of an' evening now wi' that young 'ooman glowerin' at 'im like a stage-queen, an' putting a squasher on every bit of innercent chaff."

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE two girls were just coming out of the Park one afternoon. It was the third of their visits there, and Margaret was so much better that Fanny had promised take her to an artist's on the morrow, and see if he wouldn't like to engage her to sit to him, when a gentleman who had been looking at them rather closely for some minutes suddenly crossed the road and stood in front of them.

"So, Margaret!" he said holding out his hands to her with a triumphant smile; "I have found you at last! Fire-queen, where have you been hiding yourself all this time?"

Margaret looked steadily first into his face and then down on his hand before answering. That she was taken by surprise was evident, for she had put her arm through Fanny's, and the latter girl felt the long fingers close so suddenly on her flesh that she almost cried out with the pain; but though a dark color rose in her face she showed no other signs of emotion, and her voice only sounded sulky as she answered,

"I don't know what you mean. Let us pass, if you please."

But Gerrant glanced at the shrinking figure, bent head, and shabby clothes of her companion, and did not please.

"Nonsense, Margaret," he said, coming nearer and speaking in a lower tone. "You are not going to treat me like a stranger now that I've fouud you. I know you're in a rage with me; but 'pon my soul you've no cause. If you hadn't been hasty and taken yourself off so suddenly you'd have seen that I was only joking. And you don't know how I've been hunting for you ever since. I declare I've hardly eat or slept from the anxiety of it. Come, my queen, don't be so cruel to me."

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He tried to throw a large amount of pathos and coaxing into his last few words, and put out his hand again as if to take hers by force; but Margaret stepped back, eyeing him in rather a dangerous manner.

"You are not a stranger to me,' she said very distinctly; "I wish you were; but I do not choose to speak to you in any way; and if you follow me or try to force yourself on me I will kill you. See here! you had better let me alone;" and she thrust her hand into a pocket, drawing out, greatly to Fanny's horror, a big, clumsy clasp-knife. She had it open in her slender brown fingers before the other could stop her.

"La, Hester, don't! Put it down, do. We'll be 'avin' the perlice next," cried Fanny, clutching at the weapon. As for Gerrant, he only laughed.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "She won't do me any harm. She's not as vicious as she makes herself out, are you, Margaret? And by the way," turning to Fanny, "it's deuced odd *you* should be with her. Aren't you the eldest Vanning girl? Why, I haven't seen you for ages. Some one said you'd died off long ago."

"No, Mr. Gerrant, I ain't died yet," said Fanny, not nearly as much affected by the coarseness of the suggestion as was Margaret. "I got inter a kersomption along o' catchin' cold while settin' to Keeley Vanborough fur 'is Lucreetcher; an' I've never been well enough to set much since, excep' fur the sorrerful domestic line. There's young Trembles as paints arter Faed, 'e 'ired me awhile back fur a starvin' mother kneelin' over a dead baby with my 'ands up to 'eving; but there's nothink so tirin' (when you're *not* starvin') as kneelin' an' oldin' up yer 'ands; an' I just went an' fainted on the very furst day; but——" catching herself up as she saw that Gerrant had his eyes on Margaret's face and was not listening to a word—"all that ain't nothink to you; an' I don't see as my friend, Miss Vaughan 'ere, is any more. *You* goes in fur the

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robustious school, as Miss Jameson and Kitty Gullick sets fur; an' Miss Vaughan, she don't 'ave nothink to say to that set. 'Er an' me 'ave got our kerrickters to keep up; an' seems to me as kerrickters 'asn't much to say to robustiousness now-a-days; an' yer loses yer merality as fast as yer gains flesh. That fat gurl as you was paintin' of last spring, I wouldn't ha' 'lowed a sister o' mine to set along with; an' I wonder any one would buy the picture of 'er; but I dare says as it's back in the dealer's 'ands again by now."

"Don't you be saucy," said Gerrant. "You'll come and sit to me fast enough when I ask you, Miss Vanning; and I don't know but I shall want you before long. I'm going to paint a picture of Respectability being married to the Furies. Classical subject, you know. Where are you living now, eh?"

"Don't answer him, Fanny," said Margaret imperiously. "Come along," and she tried to pull Fanny away. Gerrant laughed again.

"Fire-queen, why are you so savage when you know how much I care for you, and that I have been breaking my heart about you ever since you left me that way? What has made you so cruel? Have a little pity on me, for on my honor I only want to set myself right with you and serve you. Do you know," in an under tone, "that you are looking more beautiful than ever; and that you ought not to be rambling about with girls of this class? It isn't safe, and you can't really like it, Margaret."

"I like any thing better than you," she answered defiantly; "and I am quite safe both from you and every one else. I can take care of myself, Nino Gerrant. If you don't let me alone I will show you how by calling that policeman who is looking at us now;" and there was so much determination in her face that Gerrant saw she meant it. He drew back with a careless smile.

"You won't do anything so foolish, Fire-queen. Policemen don't take gentlemen into custody for say-

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ing how-d'-you-do' to their country acquaintances. If you're bent on going home now, however, I won't stop you; only don't think I'm going to lose sight of you again. I care a great deal too much for you, and you would have a right to blame me if I didn't. Good-afternoon, Miss Vanning. There's my address for the picture I want you for;" and he held out his card to Fanny; but her sharp eyes had seen the gleam of two big silver pieces under the pasteboard, and she made no effort to take it.

"Thank you, Mr. Gerrant; but I'd be sure to lose it' an' I can find out yer studiar from some o' yer friends as Lottie sets to, along as I want it. Good-mornin'!" and taking Margaret's arm she walked rapidly away. Gerrant let them go a little distance, and was then preparing to follow when he checked himself.

"They'd be sure to see me," he said. "and double and wind about, and play no end of tricks to throw me off the scent. Besides there'd be no good in going till she's had time to come out of her tantrums. Take a woman in the rebound—I'll write to her to-night; and, let me see, I saw the girl Lottie sitting to old Matherson on Friday. He'll know their address. By George, what glorious eyes Margaret has! I believe I shall end in making a fool of myself about her altogether. She looks more fascinating than ever in this sort of mood." And he was turning back into the Park, a meditative smile on his lips, when checked by a hand suddenly touching his elbow.

A pale, sickly-woman, rather nicely dressed, and with a quantity of nut-brown hair shading her hollow temples, was standing beside him; and Gerrant's face went pale at the sight of her.

"Alice!" he exclaimed, a muttered expletive into the bargain telling of his surprise, "*you* here! Why, where in Heaven's name did you spring from?"

"I was in Paris last, Nino," she said evasively; and Gerrant gave vent to another oath.

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"It was you then, and I was right. Do you know I thought I saw you; but I couldn't find you anywhere when I inquired."

"Did you inquire?"

"Upon my honor, yes. You were at the railway-station with a man, a young English fellow. Ask him if I didn't badger him for your address. He wouldn't give it me though."

"He did not know it; and then you nearly killed him—a lad half your own size—for trying to get another woman from you. You are growing a very bad man Nino."

"Did you stop me to tell me that, and begin moralising on it!" he asked sullenly.

The woman's manner softened in a moment.

"No, Nino; I am not going to quarrel with you. It is so long since we met that I would rather not; but I want to talk to you. You—you won't refuse me that after all that has been between us."

"No, why should I?" he answered, with an affectation of ease and cheerfulness which did not in the least impose on her. "We didn't get on well together; but I was very glad when I heard you were recovered and out of that place, and would have come to see you if I'd known where you were. Look here, I'll call a hansom, and we'll go and have some lunch somewhere. I'd say at my rooms, but bachelors' dens are too untidy for ladies. There, Alice I know you're not going to be foolish enough to say anything. *That* was all a mistake of yours; but I'm always glad to see you, for 'auld lang syne's' sake."

"I can go to old Matherson's after I've got rid of her," he added in his own mind.

* * * * * *

Hardly a word passed between the two girls as they scudded along homeward. Fanny looked behind her several times to see if they were followed; and though no sign of Gerrant was visible, suggested, "We'd bet-

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ter turn to the left 'ere, Hester; it'll take us a good bit round,' but it'll throw 'im off the scent," and another time turned into a mews and twisted Margaret out again by a narrow back yard with the same intent. Gerrant had not miscalculated the city girl's sharpness, but with all delays they got home at last, and then Margaret spoke for first time.

"Thank God!" she cried out in a hoarse, trembling voice. It was the first prayer she had uttered since leaving home, and Fanny shut the door, drew the bolt across it, and looked at her keenly.

"Hester," she said, "I'm thinkin' you've played me false, an' I don't like it. What 'ave you got to say fur yourself?"

Margaret looked up at her. She had thrown herself into the moth-eaten old arm-chair where so many hours of her convalescence had been passed, her arms hanging down on either side and her lips apart, breathing heavily as if from fatigue or the repressed agitation of the late scene. Her eyes had a half-bewildered look as she turned them on Fanny's face, but she made no answer, even to ask what the latter meant. Perhaps she did not take in the words sufficiently; only when Miss Vanning irritated by silence which seemed like a confession of guilt to her, repeated her complaint in stronger terms, and with sundry strictures on the falsity of her guest's conduct, Margaret rose up flushed and haughty, and answered:

"It is you that are saying things which are false, Fanny Vanning. Yes, false, and very impertinent too. You would not dare to speak so if I were not living here on your kindness; or if you knew——"

"Knew what?" said Fanny as she paused. "Knowed who you are, I s'pose you was goin' to say. Lor! I guessed long ago as you was above our sort 'ere: an' told Lottie so when she felt aggrawated by the hairs o' you. *That's* nothink; for if you was the Queen o' Spain, as is a reg'lar bad un, I've 'eard, I'd not 'ave

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'ad you 'ere; an' I told you so fair an' open from the beginning."

"And I told you then that you were very impertinent," repeated Margaret angrily. "I am sorry I ever came here. However, I will go now, at once."

She made towards the door as she spoke; but Fanny was between her and it, and stopped her.

"Now, don't go an' be so 'asty," cried the elder girl somewhat shaken by Margaret's loftiness and indignation. "Every one's bound to look out for themselves, an' if I've been too 'ot with you I ast your pardon; but you must own as the way that there Niner Gerrint (as is the fastettest hartist in London) spoke to you *'ad* a shady look. Now, be honest, *'adn't* it, Hester?—or Marg'rit, or whatever yer real name is! But if so be as you likes to explain it——"

"I don't like," said Margaret shortly. "I have nothing to explain, and I would rather go; so please to unbolt the door."

"That I may let *'im* in, or you out to 'im?" said Fanny coolly; then as she saw Margaret pale and shrink back with an involuntary shiver at the idea, "Look 'ere, Hester, what's the good o' fightin' with your bread and butter? Some'ow I can't 'elp believin' as you're more on the square than you seems; an' any'ow I wouldn't turn you out *now*, when you've come to me for shelter, not if it were ever so. I ain't quite as onginerous as you seems to think, as you may as well stay, fur all your sharp words to me. Niner Gerrint can't git in 'ere if so be as we keeps the door locked; an' you know you don't know no one else in London to go to. You've told me so all along."

Margaret's heart and color sank. There *was* no one else whom she knew, nowhere else she could go. Much as she loathed this place and its surroundings, it was a shelter; and if she left it, might she not find Gerrant waiting for her in the street? Her feelings towards him had altered most completely; yet despite the scorn and defiance with which she had treated

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him, his face and voice had not lost all their glamor for her, and the knowledge that it was so filled her with an instinctive dread greater than all else. The utter forlornness for her present situation was too much even for the pride and resolution which had held her up so long, and her eyes filled with sudden scorching tears.

"Oh, if I could only go home or die!" she wailed out in a sort of moan. "God help me, I wish, I *wish* I had died in the hospital." And Fanny's kind heart softened to her on the moment. She went up to Margaret patting her on the shoulder, and half-crying too for sympathy.

"Don't now, don't!" she said; "things aint as bad as all that. You've got *me* fur a frien'; an' I will own it, I've al'ays liked you, an' 'ould be real sorry to let you go. Why, if I'd knowed you was a lady born I'd ha' called you 'Miss' from the beginnin', but it wouldn't seem nat'ral to start now, would it? An' even if you 'aven't kep' quite straight all along it ain't too late to begin now, an' God forbid as I should 'elp to drive you back to it! So don't tell me nothink if you don't like. 'E's an awful bad lot is that Gerrint, an' as got the tongue of a snake, enough to come roun' twenty girls. They do say as one was too much fur 'im though, an' married 'im—Alice Scott were 'er name; but she died, or he got shut of her some'ow for 'e 'asn't 'ad no wife since I've knowed 'im." And then having partly succeeded in her effort at distracting Margaret's mind from their quarrel, she went on more rapidly, "I saw you was surprised when 'e spoke to me, an' I daresayes you wonders 'ow *I* come to know anything about 'im; but, bless you! there ain't so many hartists in London but we perfessional models gets to be familiar with pretty nigh all on 'em. I've never sat to Niner Gerrint myself, nor Lottie neither; but I've seed 'im in some o' my men's studiers; while as to 'is knowin' me, they gets acquainted with all our faces as 'as been any time in the trade. Father was a noticable man among

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'em, you know. There's folks as you may 'ear now talking of old Vanning's legs; an he's sat to more R. A. 's for 'is torso than you could count. A grand torso he had, even when e' got an old man, ad' 'ad to swell 'isself out when he wanted to look big an' dignified. Why, I don't suppose as there's a hartist worth being spoke of as don't know *our* name. You ask Lottie," —for at this juncture some one had tried the door, and after a moment's parley, during which Margaret retired behind it, the knife which had already so alarmed her friend in her hand, the younger sister had been admitted.

"They gets enough work out of us," replied Lottie, flinging her hat on to the bed, and despositing a large, wet cabbage-leaf full of winkles and a pot of jam on the table. "Look 'ere, Fan, Tom's comin' to tea this evenin', an' them's to give a relish; so put 'em out o' my sight, or I'll pickin' at 'em aforehand. I do love winkles dearly, don't you, Hester? An' whatever was the door locked for?"

"Reason," retorted Fanny concisely. "Why shouldn't it be?" but in an undertone she added, "Sht! I'll tell you all about it arterwards." And Margaret, partly hearing and partly guessing at what was said, felt the blood rushing to her face in a hot flood of humiliation. It had been bad enough to hear this poor, common girl talking with equal familiarity and contempt of Gerrant, the man whom *she* had worshipped as a superior being, and had made her idol, to be preferred above all else, but to have the story of his meeting her, with all Fanny's suspicions and comments thereon, whispered to Lottie in the intervals of getting tea ready, and afterwards confided to Tom Starling, when the affianced couple retired to enjoy a little private communion of spirit on the landing, was a shame and mortification to her beyond all words.

"*That* Gerrint!" she could hear Lottie saying, in answer to something from the her lover, "I'm sure you needn't be afraid o' *my* 'avin' anythink to say to

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'im. He's a deal too coarse-tongued an free with his impudence for me. If a man thinks me pretty—an' I s'spose some on 'em do (ha' done now, Tom, will you!)—I likes 'im to tell me so prettily, an' not—— (see 'ere, you'll get your 'ead broke, you old owl, if you don't take care. I've boxed Gerrint's ears for 'im afore now, an' I'll do the same for you)."

Poor Margaret felt sick at heart, and covering her face with her hands, prayed as she had never prayed before, that if driven to make an end of herself, to seek a rest in that dark, sullen river which rolled on, turbid and solemn, under the gloomy arches of the bridges and the gleaming gas-lamps along the embankment, that she might not go to hell for it.

Mr. Calthorpe had, in one of his sermons, spoken of deliberate suicides as people for whom there was no hope; but surely if you were well and strong, and had no other hope of escaping from a life too horrible to be borne, God would have pity on you, and let you rest somewhere; not at once, perhaps, or in heaven, but—*somewhere!*

Her face was more hopelessly sombre and her manner more stand-aloof and reserved than usual that evening. Tom Starling told Lottie it took away all his stomach for the winkles, and he and his sweetheart were driven by it to sit on the top of the stairs in the dark half the evening in consequence.

"The fac' of it is, if this goes on, you'll 'ave to marry me out of 'and, my girl," said Tom. "Tragedy plays is all very well seen from the gallery, an' washed down with a pint o' beer an' a horange; but I'm jammed if they ain't too much of a muchness in your own 'ouse all day, an' every day, an' evenin' an' mornin' performances inter the bargain."

Margaret's demeanor fairly weighed on the young man's mind, and being in conversation with a fellow-laborer while taking their noonday meal two or three days later in the yard where they were at work, he could not resist talking about her.

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"I'd just like you to see the gurl as is lodging at my young 'ooman's," he said, cutting off a chunk of bread, and carefully depositing a square inch of cheese on the top of it before conveying the double morsel to his mouth. "Fanny Vanning picked her up in the' 'orspital an' brought 'er 'ome, as was a senseless thing to do, though Fanny she's a good gurl, an' 'as always stuck to me like a brick; an' there she's been ever since, none on 'em known who she is, nor where she's come from. Fanny says she's a lady born, an' I'm hanged if she ain't hairs enough for a queen; an' my lass vows as she's country reared an' her never been in Lunnon afore. Maybe 'tis true, fur I posted a letter for 'er once to some un in Downshire; but she's as black as any Spaniard, an' 'asn't a thing belongin' to 'er but what she stands up in; 'an my opinion is as she's run away from a mad'ouse. Leastways that was my idee, but now it seems as there's one o' them artist gents comin' arter her as knowed 'er afore, an' whereas she calls 'erself Hester Vaughan, 'e called 'er Margaret, an'——"

But a fresh listener had been added to his audience, and at this juncture Tom felt his shoulder touched, and looking up saw a tall, fair-haired young man standing beside him, one whom all the workmen knew very well, the young civil engineer living at the Roman Catholic clergy-house to which these new schools they were building belonged.

"What did you say the man called her?'" Gordon asked with an abruptness which startled the workman, who having just put the wedge of bread and cheese in his mouth, was precluded from the moment from making any answer but a stare.

"Beg pardon, sir!" he stammered when he had got his jaws clear, and touching his cap confusedly as he stood up. Gordon colored a little.

"I ought to beg your pardon for listening to your talk," he said kindly. It was wonderful how courteous this "social bear," as Robin too justly called him, could be

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to his fellow-creatures in a lower rank of life; he got on well enough with *them;* "but I couldn't help catching a bit of it as I passed. and fancied you might be alluding to a young lady who is missing from her home at present. Her parents are now in the greatest anxiety about her; so if by chance you can help me to find her I needn't tell you how grateful they and I would be. Was *Margaret* the name he called her by?"

"Marg'ret; Yes, sir, that was just it," said Tom, still staring stupidly after the manner of the British laborer, but pleasantly excited withal. "A gurl about twenty: least-ways that's what she telled Fanny—Miss Vanning, I mean, the young person as she lodges with. Werry tall, with 'air an' eyes as black as your 'at, an' wears a voilet gownd, an' a black straw 'at with voilet in it. Is that anythink like the party you was lookin' arter, sir?"

"It is so like that I think God must have sent you here that she might be found. What is the address of the house where she is lodging?"

"No. 5, *Shendleigh* Street, Pimlico, sir. Back room second floor up. You rings three times, sir. Most respectable 'ouse, an' the Miss Vannings pertickler so."

But Gordon had not waited to hear the last commendation. He was already out of sight.

"Blest if it isn't gettin' more like a stage-play nor ever!" said Tom Starling.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IT was the third day since Margaret's meeting with Gerrant, and she had not been outside the house since. Fanny had been feeling stronger and had gone forth to sit to one of her old employers, both the previous day and this; and Margaret was obliged in consequence to make herself useful by cleaning the room,

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cooking her own dinner, and going on with a dress for Lottie, which Fanny was making; besides keeping the kettle boiling against the sisters came in to tea. It was not particularly pleasant work, any of it, to one unaccustomed to household drudgery; and she was such a bad needlewoman, that that which might have been the least unsuited to her became the most irksome. She had twice to unpick a long seam, her head was aching painfully from the closeness of the locked-up room and want of exercise; but though she had received two notes in Gerrant's handwriting, she had not opened either, but had crammed them into the fire, poking them down fiercely into the blaze without a moment's pause or compunction. The time had gone by when she used to slip out to get his letters, and carry them away to some green copse or hillside, where she could pore over them and press them to her heart and lips in solitude; but she was too much afraid of herself to dare opening them now.

"I have fallen low enough," she said to herself. "If I were to fall any lower I should go mad and kill some one; and then they would be worse disgraced. I'll try not to do that for their sake. Hush! What's that?"

It was a knock at the front door. Rat-tat-tat! and she knew that the three strokes meant the room she was then occupying. Her heart began to beat very quick, and she stood up and listened but that was all.

Rat-tat-tat!

"Whoever it was was knocking again; and by straining her ears she seemed to hear some sort of parley going on below. Still she did not move, and presently some one—a woman by the shuffling step—came stumbling upstairs, tried her door, and, finding it locked, tapped at it.

Margaret made no answer; only her heart seemed to be shouting in response, it beat so slowly; and the tapping was repeated more roughly, after which the voice of the woman from downstairs called out:

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"Ah, thin, Miss Vahn, why aren't ye afther openin' or answerin' to me? I said ye was in, an' then bedad I t'ought it was lyin' I was when ye didn't spake, till I looked through the kayhole. Here's a gintleman wantin' yes."

It was useless keeping silent any longer if Mrs. Donovan's eye was at the keyhole and could see Margaret's tall figure standing up between it and the light; but the girl's voice sounded strangely hoarse and faint.

"Tell the—gentleman I cannot see him."

"Indade thin an' I'd not be afther bein' so rude. 'Tis a raal gintilman he is, an' says he wants pertic'ler to see yes. 'Tis a message from yer family he's after bringin'."

"The liar, to use *their* name!" thought Margaret with a quick spasm of wrath. Indignation made her voice stronger and clearer as she replied:

"If he has any message he can leave it. I will not see him or any other gentleman."

To her utter surprise, some one else answered her this time; not Mrs. Donovan or Gerrant.

"Cousin Margaret, I must see you. If you wish it I will not keep you many minutes; but I have something to tell you of your father; and you would not have me say it to strangers. I am Gordon Maxwell."

The words were hardly spoken before the bolt was shot roughly back, the door opened, and Margaret stood before him, her face pale with a dusky pallor, and her great eyes full of feverish, unnatural light, the same look that he had seen in them when they last met his.

"Gordon Maxwell!" she said with a sort of gasp; then, her face paling still more: "What about my father? Has anything happened to him? Is he—oh! my God, it isn't anything through *me*? Tell me what you have to say."

Gordon did not answer for a moment. It was not the dingy room, the close air and general squalor which

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took away his voice; he was used enough to these, and had gone into many worse places, both in the pursuit of his quasi-missionary work among the poor, and in following after some fancied clue to his lost cousin; but the sense that it *was* she at last who was standing before him, and that he had found her, seemed almost too miraculous to be true. Margaret, however, reading a different meaning in his silence, spoke again.

"Is he—*dead?*" she said, and there was something so terrible and hollow in her voice that involuntarily he reached out his hand and took hers in a firm hold, as he answered:

"No, he is not dead; he is better. Thank God for it; but, Margaret, he has been very ill."

It was well he held her hand, for at that she turned exceedingly white and tottered as if she were going to faint. Gordon supported her to a chair and put her into it, looking anxiously at her as he added:

"It was a stroke of paralysis, and at first great fears for his life were entertained; but he has been out of danger and getting better for some little while now. When last I heard from your mother she said he was able to sit up in the arm-chair most of the day."

He said all this reassuringly, because of her extreme pallor, and of the effect of the shock which he had, designedly, given her at the beginning; but Margaret did not speak, nor did her color come back. She was trembling in every inch of her body, and her eyes were fixed on him with an expression as though each word he uttered was a confirmation of her own death-warrant.

"*Able to sit up in the arm-chair!*" Gordon used to the image of the Squire in his far worse stricken and more helpless condition, had said this almost cheerfully; but to Margaret the words seemed to convey a meaning almost incredible. *Her* father, the strong, hearty man whom nothing tired, and who was never off his feet from sunrise to sunset, a poor invalid shattered by paralysis and barely able to sit up in his arm-

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chair during the day! it seemed too terrible to be true: too terrible to be borne if it were her doing.

"When was this?" she asked at length, pressing her shaking knees together, and steadying her voice by an immense effort till it sounded cold and harsh. "Father was quite well when—when I left. When was he taken ill?"

"That same night," said Gordon. It was cruel of him; but he fancied that a little cruelty would be good for her now. Pardon and kindness might come later. "Your note reached him a little after midnight. It was that which brought on the stroke."

With a sudden movement she sprang to her feet, turning from him and wringing her hands together as she cried out in a sharp, wailing tone:

"Oh! why didn't I drown myself? Why didn't I drown myself before I ever heard? I wanted to. Why—*why* didn't I?"

"Because God did not permit you to be so wicked," said Gordon. The wildness in her eyes and voice alarmed him; but he spoke firmly and quietly. "You would soon have known it afterwards when it was too late for repentance, and when your rash act had cut you off from making the little atonement in your power. God in His mercy preserved you from such misery as that. Be grateful to Him for it."

The calm, steady voice soothed Margaret. The fair, passionless face subdued her wild excitement. She hid her face in her hands and leant her head against the window-frame for support. Gordon brought a chair to her, and pressed her gently into it, keeping his hand on her shoulder as he went on speaking:

"Margaret, I am sorry to have pained you so much; but if you had inquired—if you had cared to inquire about your parents sooner, you would have heard this and more before. You could not expect that the shock of your leaving them and in *such* a way would not have had any effect on them; or have you not thought of the terrible grief and anxiety they have

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been suffering all this time while we have been searching high and low for you?"

"I knew they would be very angry," said Margaret faintly; "but——" a sudden look of surprise flitting across the misery in her face—"*did* you search for me Gordon?" The surprise was reflected in his face as he answered:

"Did you think we should not? Your brother and I have done little else but go here and there, and make inquiries for you since you left."

"Robin!" and with the word she blushed crimson for the first time. "I thought he would be back at college."

"What, without knowing what had become of you, and with his parents in such trouble! You must think strangely of your brother."

"No," she said quietly. "I love Robin. He is always so bright and clever, and I am proud of him. We all are; but I do not think he loves me. He was for ever laughing at me; used to call me mad and savage; and when Ellice came he never thought of anything but her. I thought he would have been too much ashamed of me now to inquire after me."

"Then you don't know that he followed you to Havre and Paris, and that in the latter place he met and quarrelled with the blackguard who took you away? Mr. Gerrant did not tell you that?"

The color had died out of Margaret's face again, leaving it whiter than before.

"Did he?" she cried. "What, dear little Robin met him and quarreled with him! What do you mean by that? Did they . . . . *fight?* I never heard. How could I?"

"Ah, I thought even Mr. Gerrant wouldn't think it much to boast of," said Gordon ironically. "Robin struck him, and he, being twice your brother's size, knocked him down and so battered him about the head that he was laid up for several days; and when

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he recovered, the scoundrel had left Paris; and he could obtain no clue to you."

Margaret was crying bitterly.

"Oh! if I had only known!" she sobbed, quite broken down at last. "How he must hate me! And I was not worth it. Gordon, when you see him next tell him I never knew it, I never thought he cared so much for me; and thank him. He won't want my thanks now, it is true—but tell him I thanked him all the same for being so brave for me."

"You must tell him so yourself, Margaret," said Gordon; but the girl shook her head with a kind of shiver at the idea.

"No, no, I shall never see him again. I might have done so if . . . . Gordon, tell me, did *he*—Nino Gerrant, say anything about me?"

"Only that he denied all knowledge of you, and said—forgive me for repeating it—that you were not married to him."

He avoided looking at Margaret as he spoke, so whether she changed color or not he could not tell; but he heard her draw a long, hard breath before she answered in a harsher voice than before:

"No, I am not married to him. That is why I never went back as I said I would. A person who runs away to be married is very wicked, of course and I knew they would be very angry with me for it and perhaps refuse to forgive or see me; but I meant to try all the same. I thought when they knew that it couldn't be undone, and how it happened that I went away, that they might be kind and pardon us. It was not as if I had left them alone, you know; but Ellice is there, and she is such a gentle, willing little thing that I knew she would make them happy till I came back. I am not so bad as you think, Gordon, I did not mean beforehand to leave that way. I was taken by surprise, and I loved him so much that when he said——But all that doesn't matter now. Nothing matters in that way. When a person runs away and

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doesn't get married no one cares what they meant. That is a disgrace to them and every one belonging to them; and people can't forgive disgrace. *I* could not. If any one had disgraced me I should have said: 'Die and I will forgive you;' and I . . . Oh! if I *could* die! If I could only die!"

Her voice broke in a dry, tearless sob again. Gordon answered her gravely and calmly:

"Pardon me, but I cannot see the smallest difference between the one case and the other so far as wilful wrong-doing is concerned. The latter person may be more heavily punished, more to be compassionated; but the reckless imprudence, the previous deceit, the unmaidenliness and disobedience, how are they altered, let the result be what it may?"

His voice was gentle, but the words were the severest Margaret had ever yet heard. It was the actual running away, the disgrace on her name of which she had thought hitherto; not the conduct that had led up to it. The latter had over-swept the former, the result blotted out the cause; but now it all came over her at once; all that he had said since he came in seemed to ring in her brain and overwhelm her. She rose up in her chair stretching out her hands as if to keep him off.

"Hush! don't say any more. For God's sake go away and leave me. I dare say you are right. I believe somehow that you are good, and that what you say is true, but I can't bear it; and—and it is no good now. Ask them to forget me. That is all I want, and —and please go away."

"Not without you," said Gordon quickly. "Do you think I only came here to tell you this, which, perhaps, I had no right to say at all? I came to show you what you had done that you might make amends for it to take you away with me to the home where your father and mother are waiting for you; waiting and longing for your coming as they have been ever since you left."

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But he might as well have spoken to the winds. Poor Margaret, blinded by her own sullen indifference of old to the tender side of her father's character, could only see in him an outraged judge, casting from him the child who had disgraced his name. She could not even believe in her mother's love and mercy now that she realised all the grief that she had brought on her. The very word "home" only brought up a vision of the familiar faces altered into scorn and contempt at the sound of her name, of the sunny house darkened by her presence. With all her heart and soul she was longing to return; but dread and humiliation kept her back; and she combated all his arguments with a kind of despairing obstinacy, telling him that he would not urge them if she belonged to *him*. He would be glad then to send her away and never see her again. He did not know her father as she did, or he would not speak so; and then she turned on him fiercely and said:

"See now, you who want me to go back, you would be just the same in their place. If *you* had people you loved and were proud of, would you like to take me now from this hole?" glancing round her at the dingy room, "to live with them? And you have—how could I forget?—you have Ellice whom I left in my place. I know that you love her. Would you like me to go back to her, good and praised by every one as she is, and go out everywhere with her again, her friend as we were before?"

For one half second Gordon hesitated. Never perhaps till that moment did he feel how precious in reality Ellice was to him, his one little sister, pure and unspotted and fair in face and mind. It was a struggle fierce as it was short; but the nobler man within him conquered; and before Margaret had time to notice his hesitation, he answered fully and cordially:

"Yes; you are right. I love Ellice dearly. She is the one nearest to me on this earth, but my love for her would be less, I should think less, of her if I

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thought she could cease to be your friend because you are in trouble; yes, even though the trouble is your own making, provided you are sorry for it. Come with me and see if I shrink from taking you to her. Oh! she is not where you think her. She is not taking up your place at home, but sharing in your punishment. Your parents suspected her of having connived at your wrong-doing and sent her away; and until you return and clear her she will stay away. You were very wrong to be jealous of her Margaret; for you had no cause. Your parents thought no more of her than of the most casual stranger the moment *you* were in peril or trouble. They would have banished her to the other side of the world rather than that you should have been vexed by her presence; and Ellice would not have grumbled at it for a moment. There is no one who has grieved for you more or longed more for your return. Come to her. She is in London; not twenty minutes' walk from you now. Come to her that you may see how glad she will be at the sight of your face again."

He held out his hands to her as he spoke, a smile, gentler and more tender than any but a very few had ever seen, on his face sweetening and redeeming its plainness; but he was not prepared for Margaret taking them in both her feverish palms and kissing them passionately. The young man flushed up like a girl.

"Don't be angry with me," she said quickly. "Ellice used to say you were so good, you were nearly a saint, and I think you are. I am trying to believe what you say, but it is very hard; for if it is so, I have injured that poor child and lost her her home, and she cannot but hate me for it as I should have hated any one who had done so by me. Oh! what a curse I have been to every one when I only thought of myself! No; I will not go with you; but go you to her and tell her that I never meant to hurt her, that I hoped that was she at the Croft, and that I am very, very sorry she should have suffered through me·

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and then if she will come to me here and is not ashamed of me afterwards I—I will do whatever you like, Gordon Maxwell."

"That is, you will let me telegraph for your brother to take you home," said Gordon, smiling at her; but Margaret still hung back.

"Not my brother. I could not bear to see *him* now, before my father. Oh! if I were not so afraid of my father. I know how bad I have been to him, but I could not bear that he should thrust me away. Gordon, I will go with you. I will do what you tell me; but won't you—can't you bring me some word from himself first, that I may know if he will have me back?"

Gordon thought for a moment.

"Yes," he said, "it is only a little trouble, and if it will make you easier that does not matter. Margaret, if you will promise me to stay with Ellice till I come back, I will go down to the Croft by to-night's train break the news to your parents that you are found, and bring you back a message from their own lips to-morrow. Is that agreed?"

"Would you do all that for me? It is very good of you." And, for the first time, he saw a ray of light in her altered face. "You *are* good," she said again; "and I can't thank you for it. I never can thank people; but tell them *everything*. Let them know all that has happened to me, and all I have done, before you ask them to forgive me. Ah, me! I suppose I must tell it you first."

"Is that necessary? Surely you would not like to do so, Margaret," said Gordon, wondering even in his stern simplicity

She looked up at him.

"Why not?" she said with something of her old weary harshness, "They may think it worse than it is; and unless you know all how can you tell *them*? I will never hide anything any more · And then, in a brief hard way not looking at him but like a child

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saying a distasteful lesson to its master, she told exactly how her acquaintance with Gerrant had begun, and how she had encouraged it till she grew to love him too much for her own strength, and let him persuade her to go away with him. "I think the cold and fever must have dazed my head, or I wouldn't have done it even then,' she said drearily. "It seems to me now as if I must have been mad; but when I was in the train, with the cool evening air in my face, it came back to me how *they* would feel at my leaving them without a word: and when we got out at the junction to change for Southampton, I wrote to them, as you know. He did not see me or he would have been angry. All the way in the train he joked and laughed and talked of what we would see and do in Paris till it seemed as if my running away was only a joke and nothing to fret about. There were other people in the carriage with us; and one asked me if we were going to France for a pleasure trip, and said that she was too. When we got to Southampton he took me straight on board the steamer. It was cold, and I was coughing dreadfully. I had never been on the sea before, and the smell of the boat made me sick. He wanted me to stay on deck, but I felt so ill I went down to the ladies' cabin and stayed there till morning. Oh! I was dreadfully sick; I thought I was going to die. The woman who had talked to me in the train was there too, and talked to me again. She was vulgar, but very kind, and somehow she found out that I was running away to be married and said a lot about it to me—it dosen't matter what. I was very angry with her at the time, and would not speak to her again, but when we got to Havre and he took me on shore to an hotel, I told him he must go and get the license for our marriage at once and I would wait for him there. He quite laughed at my saying so at first, and wanted to make a joke of it saying we must put off that performance till we got to Paris; but the woman had

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made me angry and my head was aching; I said we we would not put it off at all, and that he must do as I wished or I would go back. Then—you will not believe it—but he made game of me. He said—I cannot tell you all he said, except that he had never asked or meant to marry me at all; and that I had come with him of my own will, and could not go back again. I was in such a dreadful passion, even more at his light, sneering way than his words, that I hardly listened to it all; but of a sudden it seemed to come to me that though I had cared so much for him, he had never cared for me at all, that he had only made use of me and despised me in his heart; and in that moment my love for him seemed to turn to hate. I could not utter a single word; and he thought by my silence that I was coming round; and began to coax me with pleasant words, saying I was a sensible girl after all, and he would go and order breakfast that we might start directly afterwards for Paris. I only smiled, and he went out of the room. . . I heard him lock the door on the other side. . .

"There was a window opening out of the room into the garden. Directly he was gone I slipped out of it, and across the garden, through a little back door into the street. No one saw me, and I walked very fast down a lot of back streets till I came to a little confectioner's. I went in there and asked for a cake, and if I might sit down and rest. They showed me into a little back room, and I stayed there till dusk. I had a sovereign and two or three shillings in my purse, and I would have gone back by the steamer; but I knew *he* would be watching on the pier for me, and I determined to go to Paris instead, and asked the people at the shop to show me to the station. But when I got to Paris I did not know what to do, or where to go. It seemed such a huge place, and there was such a noise, and I was afraid to walk about the streets, and every one spoke French so quickly I could not easily understand them.

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"I hung about the station, keeping out of sight and feeling very miserable, until suddenly I saw *him* coming from it. He had followed me by the next train. After that I was afraid to stay longer. I hid myself till he had called a cab and been driven away, and then I made up my mind to go back to England. Not *home!* I did not dare do that; and he had taunted me with all that would be said of and to me if I did; but to London. I thought I could get something to do there. He had told me once that I could make a fortune as a model, and I said to myself, 'That is what I will be.' Fortunately I had money, for knowing I should want more in Paris I had sold my watch and a ring I had to the confectioner at Havre, and they had given me French money for them.

"I got to Charing Cross safely, and then I walked about till I saw 'Apartments' written up in a window in a little narrow street, and I went in and took one. I saw it was very poor, so I thought it would not cost much; and next day I asked some one to show me a picture gallery. I made sure the painters would go there to look at their pictures, and Nino had painted several of me, so I thought if I saw *them* I would stand by one till I saw any one looking at me, as he did when he wanted to paint me, and then ask them if they wished to have me for a model; but I did not see them anywhere, and though people looked at me, I did not know if they were artists, and I did not like to speak to them, though I went three times. All this while I had very little food, and my cough kept getting worse, and I had such a pain in my head and side that I could not even sleep. I longed to go home, but I was afraid; and then I became so ill that I had to be taken to a hospital. The girl who lives here was a patient there also, and when I got better she brought me home with her, and has kept me ever since; but I have often wished to kill myself, I was so miserable, only I thought if I did I should go to hell. The other day, however, I was out, and I met *him*. He stopped me and tried

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to make me listen to him, but I got away. I have not dared to go out since, and to-day I thought it would be better to drown myself and end it. Then you came, and—and that is all."

"*All!*" Gordon repeated, with a gladness in his eyes and voice which her dulled brain hardly comprehended. "That is really all? You have told me the whole story? God be thanked! what misery your parents will be relieved from when they hear it!"

"Did they think it was worse?" said Margaret, coloring faintly. "Other people would, I know, but they—they might have known better; and, as you said, it makes no difference except to me. I have *done* just as wrong in leaving them, and the punishment of it will fall on me and them just the same. Do you still believe that they will forgive me?"

"I do not believe—I *know* it," said Gordon earnestly. "Margaret, Margaret! can you see how wonderfully, miraculously good God has been to you, guarding you from evil, and bringing you back to us in safety, and yet doubt in the goodness of His servants, your own father and mother? Of His own infinite mercy He has saved you, you poor, reckless girl, almost against your own will. Trust to Him then now, and thank Him for it while I go to bring Ellice to you."

And with a last firm pressure of her hand he dashed off and left her alone.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ELLICE was by this time established at Mrs. Winstanley's as a companion to that lady in her *creche* for poor children. In his desire to take advantage of what he considered her good disposition Gordon had, immediately on receipt of her letter, persuaded Father Bertram to accompany him to the lady's house, and

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had then and there so concluded the desired arrangement, that though he came to the Devereuxs' the next day with a request that Ellice would go with him to call on Mrs. Winstanley, the matter was to all intents and purposes settled, even to the hour of her coming in; all of which the girl had to break to her relations on her return. She had grown cooler by that time, and it seemed terribly sudden even to herself, and by no means over-courteous to the Devereuxs', though she had reason to believe that only her presence prevented them from leaving town themselves on a series of visits. But *Gordon* had arranged it, and, needless to say, Gordon's arrangements were unimpeded by any thought of social conveniences or civilities! The thing was to be done, and the sooner the better, so where was the good of wasting words over it? and though both Mrs. Devereux and Lyle expressed volumes of surprise and regret at their guest's unexpected departure, the elder Miss Devereux, at any rate, was secretly not ill pleased at it. She had a shrewd suspicion that her cousin might somehow have come in for a peep at that *tete-a-tete* and hand-kissing before mentioned. Ellice's manner afterwards had been certainly very reserved and dignified, not so much as permitting any further conversations on her lover; and probably even if she were gone, young Herne might not think fit to relinquish *his* visits to Phillimore Gardens on his return.

The cousins parted without any sorrow on either side, and with a good deal of constraint on Ellice's. As for Lyle, the perfection of her manner was never to be made appear ill at ease or constrained by the most untoward of events, and she went through the conventional embraces, promises to write, and hopes that "dear Cousin Lisa" would soon come and stay with them again, and the customary social fervor. I may as well observe, however, that Ellice never did happen to stay there again, nor did Robin resume his visiting at Phillimore Gardens. The house is just as

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pleasant as ever, and five o'clock tea there just as popular, though late hours and perennial agreeability are beginning to show in a little sharpening about Miss Devereux's cheek bones and her remarks respecting others of her sex have, perhaps, in consequence, a keener edge; but she is quite as graceful and quite as fascinating as in her nineteenth year, and the only wonder is, as everybody says, that she should not have married well long ago. For my part I wonder at it too. Plainer and duller girls go off every day. That Lyle Devereux should remain single is decidedly mysterious, but nevertheless it is a fact.

Ellice entered Mrs. Winstanley's establishment with a heart even sadder and more sober than that which she carried from her native country. It seemed to her that by this step she had finally parted both with Robin and the life which, begun on her landing at Southampton, had come to a virtual end on the day Gordon carried her away from the Croft. What was before her she could not tell—whether more changes and further wanderings, or a life of devotion to the work which the good woman who received her had already consecrated her own. She herself would have chosen the latter had she been given her choice, so weary was she, poor child, of the constant uprootings and transplantings of the last months. Her heart felt too torn and bruised to struggle any longer. A refuge at any price was what she craved. She would not blame Robin even if his allegiance had strayed from her, for had he not often told her that her coldness would have driven any man away but himself long before? though Lyle she did blame, with genuine girlish anger and scorn, for inviting his defection. But, after all, Lyle might have a different code of honor to herself. These English people must be very different to her in their ways of thinking and feeling, or how could she, a girl of nineteen, meaning *so* well, and inclined to love all about her, have found herself after five months an exile from all belonging to her, her home and her love

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taken away and her lot thrown among strangers. Certainly they were an odd, hard people, these English, loving and true to their own families perhaps, but harsh and careless of all outside. Such a fate could never have happened to her in her own sunny land, and among the warm-hearted people of the south.

Her small face was as meek and pale as an autumn daisy when she arrived at the *creche*, and Mrs. Winstanley judged her favorably by it, and put the sturdiest and most fractious of the babies into her arms on the spot.

"You look gentle and patient," said the lady, "and as if you wanted running about. These children will give you plenty of exercise for legs and patience too. Let me see how you will do with them;" and Ellice had been doing her best with them for nearly two days when late on the afternoon of the second she was summoned down to the parlor to see Gordon Maxwell, and greeted with:

"Ellice, she is *found*, Margaret is found! I have just left her, with the promise to take you to her. Put on your bonnet quickly child. I'll tell you all about it on the way."

Gordon had never looked so excited or spoken so quickly in his life; and Ellice was almost equally elated. The news coming when she had almost lost hopes of any seemed too good to be true; and when she heard of the brokendown, despairing mood Margaret was in, and how she had expected Ellice to shrink from and dislike her, the tears gushed from the girl's eyes, and she was as anxious as Gordon to get back to the runaway. Unfortunately, however, Mrs. Winstanley was out, and even when she returned, and leave for Ellice to go was obtained, explanations had to be entered into and Margaret's story told, so as to induce the charitable lady to allow the poor girl to be brought back there for the night; although, when she understood the matter, she willingly acceded to the request, and kissed Ellice, saying.

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"I see I shall lose my companion as soon as I have got her. However, my child, if your duty lies elsewhere do not think of me, but do it readily."

But all this took time, and occasioned a delay which, had it been a little longer, might have led to a serious result.

The front door of No. 5 Shendleigh Street stood open according to its usual wont when the cab with the two cousins in it drew up in front of that residence and they had a vision of two of the female lodgers stretching their necks up the stairs, and apparently listening to something that was going on above them.

"Shure an' it's a gran' lady she must be, fur this is the second gintleman that's afther comin' to call on her the day; but it's quarelin' *they* are by the soun' of 'em," Gordon heard the one who had let him in in the morning say. He was just helping Ellice to alight, but stopped short at this, and saying. "Stay in the cab, Lisa, till I bring her out to you," went swiftly up the stairs, nearly tumbling over the two lady lodgers and causing them to disappear into their respective quarters with astounding quickness. He did not notice them. Indeed he was too much excited by the sound of a man's voice in the Vannings' room to have thought for anything else.

Rightly enough he guessed that Gerrant was there before him.

The artist stood just within the room with his back to the door, which was half open, and facing Margaret, whose dark face and flashing eyes gleamed out of the shadow beyond where she stood leaning against the table, both hands grasping the back of a chair as if for support. Gerrant had been speaking persausively.

"This is such nonsense, Fire-queen," he said. "I *know* that you love me just as I love you, so why should you deny it? You flew into a passion and ran away from me because you took it into your beautiful gipsy head that I didn't care for you. My dearest girl, you never were so mistaken, and if you had only stayed a

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little longer, if you had listened to reason, you would have seen it for yourself, and saved us both from all the misery we have been through since. Care for you? Why, is not my being here now proof that I care more for you than for any other woman in the world? Is not my long searching for you, the unhappiness I have suffered on your account, enough to make you believe me? Come, *Margherita mia*," and his voice dropped to a lower and more tender key, 'tell me that you do and that you love me as you did in those summer days on the hills when we first met one another."

"*Love you!*" repeated Margaret. If he had hoped to soften her by that allusion to the hills of her childhood he was mistaken; for her eyes only took a fiercer glitter. "Listen to me, Nino Gerrant: I *did* love you, I was mad, and I worshipped you till you showed me what you really were. If you had not done that, I might have gone on worshipping you to my dying day. But I am glad you did. Yes, I am glad you did so soon; for it must be bad to be married to any one one hates as I hate you now. I would not be your wife to-day if you asked me, and if you had a crown to give me; for there is not an atom of feeling for you in my heart but loathing and contempt. It was you who despised me before. Now, I despise you. Do you hear me? I despise you; and if you do not leave the room and me I will go out of it myself and ask one of the poor women below to take care of me. You had better go away. For your own sake you had better; for some one will be here soon to take me home to my father; not my brother whom you, coward as you are, tried to kill or injure for his love for me whom you had slandered to him; but a relation as big and strong as yourself; and you will not like *him* to find you here."

"You are a fool," cried Gerrant impatiently, "or rather, if you were to say you are mad now it would be truer. What, your relations have found you out, have they? and because your own hot-headedness and folly has driven you to starve in a hole like this you

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are ready to let them drag you back to be pointed and jeered at, held up to every one as an example of what evil girls come to, and only tolerated on sufferance in a house where every one will look down on you. Do you think you could bear *that?* Margaret, I know you better, better than you know yourself. I don't believe a word that you have been saying. You were miserable enough in that stagnant life yonder before. You would be a hundred times more miserable if you returned to it now."

"*Let* me be, then!" Margaret broke in defiantly. "I shall have deserved it;" but he would not listen to her.

"Hear me out, child. I think I am as mad as you; for all you say only makes me love you more. Upon my soul I believe I would rather have your hatred that another woman's affection; for I believe I could tame it soon; and I only. There, I will be honest with you —I never meant to marry. I am not fond of the noose, but for your sake, and to soften those lovely, fierce eyes of yours, I will put my head into it, *with you.* Come Fire-queen, are you appeased now? Say yes, and I will prove it for you. I will take out the license tomorrow, and you may write and tell your relations that you want none of their charity, for you are Nino Gerrant's wife, unless, indeed, you would rather go back to drudge in penitence."

For one moment Margaret wavered. After all it was the only voice which had ever spoken to her of love. He was the only man to whom her heart had ever answered, and he was tempting her sorely—sorely. The next, she threw up her hands with a sort of cry:

"No; no. Go away from me. If I listened to you I should kill you. I would rather die. Oh! God help me!" she wailed out. "If Gordon were only here!"

He was within a couple of yards of her as she spoke; for in the same breath his right hand had closed in a grip like iron on Gerrant's collar, fairly lifting the artist off his feet, and by a prodigious effort of strength

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swinging him round and out of the room with such force, that, utterly taken by surprise, Gerrant could not regain his feet, and would have gone headlong down the stairs if his downward course had not been broken midway by Tom Starling, who was just coming up them with the Vanning girls behind him, and who received him with such a shove in the chest as nearly took away the little breath he had left.

"Now then, Mister!" said Tom, glancing up at Gordon's fair flushed face and stalwart figure on the landing above, and comprehending the situation at a glance. "Whatever you are skyrocketing about other folks' 'ouses for? Dont you know decent manners yet, young man, that you must go intrudin' o' yerself into ladies' rooms without being hasked? I say, Fanny, if this 'ere's the painting gent you was speaking on, blest if he ain't taken to tumbling for a change of trade. Leastways you'd better go on an' tumble out o' 'ere double quick, my man, if you don't wish yer 'ead broke. We don't want no one arter the young woman 'ere, as is too respec'able for the likes o' you," cried the builder, waxing wrathful as all his dormant jealousies of artists rose before him; and apparently Gerrant was of the same opinion. With Margaret deaf to all his appeals, and protected by the two men, he was not disposed to persist in efforts which he felt could only end in his further humiliation, and would be sure to be repeated in every studio within twenty-four hours by the giggling models who were looking on. Muttering indistinct threats to the effect that Gordon might expect to hear from him soon, and making a vain attempt to carry himself jauntily, Nino Gerrant slunk away; and Ellice, looking from the cab-window, wondered where she had seen before the ill-conditioned evil-eyed man who scowled at her as he hurried past. They none of them ever saw him again.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

IT is time now to return to Robin, who had come up to town that very day full of the importance of his mysterious friend's letter, and ignorant of all that was happening to those in whom he was so much interested. In the joy of his success with his mother and his irritation at Gordon's past meddling with Ellice's concerns, which he felt convinced now was the cause of the whole misunderstanding, the young man felt as if he could afford to dispense with his cousin's assistance in future. He would find his sister for himself, and no thanks to any man; and as the first step to this, he resolved not to show Gordon the letter he had received; but to go after the writer on his own account. He did so; but found that the people at the post-office did not know the woman's address. She came there for her letters, but that was all. She had already been once that day, and might or might not come again; so Robin had nothing for it but to write to her there, begging her to make an appointment with him and enclosing his own address; after which he dined at the club, and then, feeling that he could do no more that evening, and having a great longing to see Ellice and give her his mother's message, called a hansom and went off to Phillimore Gardens.

But here again disappointment awaited him; and of a sort wholly unexpected. Miss Ellice had left there, the servant said; left for good the day before yesterday; and Mrs. and Miss Devereux were dining out. No, she didn't know Miss Ellice's present address. She thought it was somewhere in London, for, at bidding good-bye, Miss Devereux had told her to come and see them often, and said the Underground was so handy; but where it was she had no idea. So in the end poor Robin was forced to go back to his hotel and to bed, feeling very much quenched and disheartened,

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and more than half inclined to swallow his pride and go off to knock up Gordon Maxwell. He little thought that that young man was then just arriving at the home he himself had so lately quitted, having left Margaret safely installed with Ellice under Mrs. Winstanley's care.

On the following morning, however, he received by the first post a note in answer to that he had written last night. It was a mere scrawl signed "A. Grant," blurred and blotted, and evidently written in great haste; but it said the writer would be waiting to speak to him in the waiting-room of a railway station close by, almost as soon as he could have read the letter; and Robin went off without delay, and half fearing that he should find himself again disappointed.

This time however fate favored him. The woman was there before him; and her first words, "Do you know who I am? I am Nino Gerrant's wife," relieved him of any doubts he might have had as to the honesty of her offers to help him. He was less gratified when he found that she was in greater trouble than himself; and rather in want of than able to give assistance; and he was obliged to listen to her whole story before she would even give him any of the information she had.

It seemed that the poor creature had been married to Gerrant when he was much younger, and when he had been satisfied with the paternal name of Grant. Her father, however, had disapproved of the union, and it had taken place in secret in an out-of-the-way London church and under false names. She was only a girl of seventeen at the time, very weak and silly; so she thought it was all right, and as Gerrant took her abroad at once, and was for some time very kind to her, she was as happy as the day was long. With her first child, however, she had a long and serious illness from which she never thoroughly recovered, and which robbed her of nearly all her beauty. The child died after wailing out six months, of sickly life, and Gerrant,

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who from the day of her illness had begun to neglect her, grew to be more and more cold and careless in his manner, and less and less at home. Then she began to grow jealous of the models, and they had desperate quarrels, which culminated in her threatening to leave him, on which Gerrant turned round on her and told her with a brutal laugh that she might do so as soon as she liked. He had only kept her out of charity, for she was not his wife; their marriage, owing to the false names and some other informality, which she had known of, but had treated as a joke at the time, being invalid.

That turned her brain. She had been in a nervous, over-wrought state for a long time; and this cruel speech was too much for her. Fever came on; and when she recovered her sense it was to find that she had been insane a long time, and confined in an asylum, where she still was. Even then she was not well enough to be removed, her mind, though becoming daily more lucid, not being considered strong enough to admit of her going out into the world; and when she did at last do so, it was with a conviction of the truth of Gerrant's words which crushed her so completely as to take all hope out of her life except to hide herself away in some quite corner and be forgotten. She was not penniless. Her father was dead, and left her enough to keep herself in a small, poor way; and on this she lived for a couple of years, till the idea, gradually growing stronger and more fixed in her brain, that Gerrant might have only said it to frighten her, or had been wrong in his law, determined her to seek him out and try to right herself. She went to London accordingly, but he was gone. She did not even know the name of the church at which she was married, and her vain efforts only told upon her health. She was going to York, when Robin first saw her, to hunt out an artist friend of Gerrant's, who had been present at their wedding. There she heard accidentally that her husband had written to some one

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that he was just starting for France and she followed him.

"I thought if I could make him love me again, that even if we were not married, he might have done it now," she said. "He *did* love me once. Why shouldn't he do it again, Mr. Herne, if I can love him? But when you told me about the girl, and I over heard what he said to her in the Park, I saw I had very little chance. Still I tried. I spoke gently to him, and he pretended to be glad to see me, and was quite smooth and pleasant; but he never would for one moment speak as though I were his wife, and I felt sure he was only playing with me to keep me quiet, and resolved to keep a watch on him. Yesterday he escaped me; and though I went to his rooms I found he had gone out after lunch, leaving word he might not be back till late. I had bribed the servant, and she told me that he had written two letters to a 'Miss Herne, care of Miss Vanning, Shendleigh Street,' and had been very impatient because no answers had come to them. She believed that he had gone there now, for it was after asking again about them that he had muttered to himself:'I was a fool to waste time. Better to have gone than written,' and had dressed himself very carefully and gone out."

'Gone out! Gone to Shendleigh Street? Is *that* where she is? And where is it? Oh! if I had only known this yesterday!" cried Robin, springing to his feet in a great state of agitation, and looking as if he were about to rush off then and there. Gerrant's disowned wife checked him. however.

"Wait! Why should you be so hasty? But you are only a boy, and boys are always hasty. You do not even know the number of the street; and I did not then, and the girl could not tell it me; but she said Miss Vanning was a model and sat to Mr. Matherson, the rustic painter; for he had been calling on Gerrant and talking about her only the day before; and knowing his house I went there and got the number. It is

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five. Will you go there now with me. I think you will find her all right; for Nino came back alone last night. I ascertained that."

"I will go this instant," said Robin. He was chafing at the delay he had already experienced, and would willingly have left his informant and dashed off on his own account. Margaret might be unwilling to see him; or if she till cared for Gerrant their meeting might be a very painful one. There were a thousand doubts and difficulties to hamper him which had not troubled the mind of his one-ideaed cousin; and if he could only have shaken Mrs. Grant off he would have been ungratefully happy. This was not to be however, and together they arrived at Shendleigh Street, creating an excitement there which they would have better understood had they known that a rumor had already got about that the Queen of Spain had been lying *perdu* at the Vannings'; and that two "jukes," one of her husband's party and one of the enemys', had come after her yesterday; the latter getting half killed for his pains.

Robin was as white as a sheet with excitement when he got to the top of the stairs; and Fanny who looked at him very distrustfully when he asked after his sister, nearly knocked him down by her short answer:

"I don't know nothink about your sister. If you mean Miss 'Erne, as we called Hester Vaughan, she's not here. A gentleman took 'er away yesterday."

A *gentleman!* It was hard to say which repeated the word in greater agony of mind. Margaret's brother, or Gerrant's wife. Fanny soon saw that their description of themselves was genuine, and proceeded to explain that Miss Herne was quite safe. Her cousin had come for her; and there was a fair young lady waiting for her in the cab below, who had kissed her ever so, and cried with gladness at seeing her.

"For that matter they'd all cried, her an' Lottie, and Miss 'Erne wust of all, she were so overset by that Gerrint's coming;" and then Miss Vanning described

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with such gusto, not to say exaggeration, how the fair gentleman had half killed Gerrant, that when Robin looked round he saw that poor Alice Grant had disappeared, probably to hasten to the side of the wounded and ingrate spouse who had deserted her. But Fanny had a great disappointment for him. In the confusion and agitation of departure she had heard without remembering Mrs. Winstanley's address, and could only tell him it was somewhere near; and described it as a place where they took in poor women's babies to mind for the day. "Miss 'Erne" had promised to write to her, and so had the tall fair gentleman; but Robin could not wait for that, and departed leaving Fanny almost overwhelmed with thanks for what she had told him; and considerably richer than she had got up that morning.

He went to Gordon's office; and found that he was away on leave of absence; then to the clergy-house, and heard he had gone down to the country the night before; but was expected back that day; after which poor Robin could do nothing but say that he would call again, and go and get some food which he much wanted. He was too excited, however, to feel tired, and in the joy and wonder of knowing that Margaret was found, was *with* his own Ellice, and under Gordon's protection he almost forgot that it was his high-minded resolve to owe nothing more to that gentleman which had kept himself in the dark as to what had happened. He could have hugged Gordon for having taken Ellice to Margaret. He could have kissed Ellice's feet for the kisses she had given his sister. He was in such a turbulent state of mind that minutes seemed hours to him; and he paid three visits to the clergy-house before he heard that Gordon was in; and then nearly knocked his cousin down with the effusiveness of his greeting.

Young Maxwell himself was a cool as a cucumber. —"You did not write to say you were coming up from the Croft, so I fancied you were there; or I should

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have telegraphed to you at your club. Yes, I went down to your home last night, broke the news to your mother: and came up by the first train this morning, bringing a note for your sister; and your father's old factotum, James, with me. He took the girls back by the mid-day train; and I was going round to you when I got back here, only I heard you had called."

"They are gone then?" said Robin, "if I had only known! and Ellice *too?* Ellice with her?"

"Margaret would not have gone without Ellice," said Gordon stiffly; "and your mother sent a special message to her, begging her to return. Otherwise she would have stayed where she was and where she was much wanted."

"Bother her being wanted!" cried Robin, ignoring the stiffness altogether, and with a face beaming all over. "I should think *we* wanted her a deal more, the darling! Quite right that the mother did send for her. She never ought to have let her go away, and she knows it now. Look here, old fellow," planting both hands on Gordon's shoulders, "you know how I love Ellice, and that I've asked her to be my wife a dozen times. It has been only this abominable business that has come between us; but that's settled now, and I got my mother's consent only the other day, and explained it all to her. Won't you wish me luck and go down with me this evening? Of course I shall start by the earliest train. Indeed I wonder you didn't go with *them.*"

I thought I should only be in the way there, and that they would be better by themselves," said Gordon, still stiffly. "James would take every care of them. Besides, I have my work to attend to, and I'm going to the office now. I have lost time enough already. Of course you must do as you please about going to your own house."

"Then you won't wish me joy with Ellice?" said Robin, mortified. "At last, however, you must let me thank you for all that you have done for us. I am

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sure I don't know how we shall ever be grateful enough to you."

Gordon grunted.

"I don't know that Ellice will have you yet. If she does, I will wish you joy; and if not, you can show your gratitude by letting her alone and not persecuting her. As for me, I haven't done anything to deserve thanks." And he marched off.

Certainly Robin had some cause to consider his cousin a bear that morning.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I WILL pass over the details of Margaret's reception at home. There are things that can be imagined better than described; joys so intimately woven with pain that one may feel them perhaps all the more intensely for the impossibility of putting them into words, and this was one of them.

Mrs. Herne's note to Margaret had contained only these words:

"Father and I are thanking God over our daughter's recovery. Do not lose an hour in coming back to us, my child. All is forgiven; but we want you sorely."

While to Gordon she said:

"Tell Ellice, with my dear love, that I can't ask her to forgive us for misdoubting her. If she wants to show me that she has done so, she'll forget she is not my own child already, and will come back to me never to go away from us again. Robin will say more to her than I can."

It was not to be wondered at that within an hour of the receipt of these two messages the girls started on their homeward journey: even Margaret's strong agitation and nervousness, controlled by the assurance repeatedly impressed on her by Gordon, that so

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from her flight being known and the scandal of it bruited about, it had been kept so jealously hidden, that only old Martha knew that she and Ellice were not away somewhere on a visit till the Squire was better, and that it depended now on her own courage and self-command to keep up the fiction and save her family from deeper mortification and vulgar gossip.

It was not without forethought that old James had been sent up to town to bring the young ladies back from the friend with whom they had been staying, and Mrs. Herne had announced to the household the previous night that the Squire was so much better that he had expressed a wish for his girls, so they would return the next day. She was afraid poor Miss Maggie would be dreadfully upset at the sight of him. She was always so devoted to him, for all her silent way, that it had been partly from fear of the effect of his stroke on her that she had been kept away so long; and she feared it had been a great grief to her, poor child, but sick people's fancies must be consulted, and the master hadn't been able to bear any voice but hers till now.

There is a beautiful story contained in one of Miss Proctor's ballads of a nun who broke her vows and fled from her convent, returning after years of sin and folly, to find that her guardian angel had kept her place all the time, and with such gracious completeness that the sisters were even unaware of her defection. Mrs. Herne had been her daughter's guardian angel, and Margaret came home to find her "place was kept." She had nothing to do but to go back into it as in days of yore. The mother's love had spared her all that her proud nature had most shrunk from. Yet there was no word spoken when she found herself at last in that mother's arms; and no human eye, not even Mrs. Herne's, beheld the meeting between Margaret and her father.

Robin arrived about eight o'clock that same evening and walking unannounced into the parlor, found his

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mother resting in the big arm-chair by the fire, with a look of peace on her face which had not been seen there for many a week back, and Ellice seated on a low stool at her feet, her fair little head leaning against the arm of the chair in the old way, and her hand fondly in that of her mother's friend. The young man's entrance of course put an immediate change on the face of the tableau, Mrs. Herne jumping up to kiss and welcome him, and whisper that Maggie was upstairs with her father, and was not coming down again that evening. The squire had not let her out of his sight all day, but she was looking sadly shaken and tired, and had promised to go to bed early; while Ellice stood up trembling all over, and changing from red to white in a very lovely manner, but which rather belied the efforts she was making to look as if she was not agitated in the least. Mrs. Herne had already told her of all Robin had said on his last visit, an account which so contradicted the hand-kissing which she herself had seen, that she began to feel as if her eyes had deceived her, or as if there might be some explanation of the performance besides that of her lover's fickleness.

Still she did not know how he had taken her refusal to see him that day, and her leaving the Devereuxs; and was so afraid to look at him that when she found her shyly outstretched hand coolly disregarded, and herself taken into her lover's arms kissed, positively kissed before his mother's face, she was so utterly astounded and bewildered that she almost cried out in amazement. What *would* Mrs. Herne think of such conduct? But Mrs. Herne seemed to think it was all right, for she smiled most benignantly, and merely said:

"Now, Robbie, don't eat her up. You've frightened all the color out of the maid's face, poor child, with your roughness."

After which the good woman declared that she must go and see after the master, and put her other daugh-

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ter to bed; and so trotted away, leaving the young lovers to themselves.

It was a very long operation that making the Squire comfortable for the night, and putting Margaret to bed in her own little room again—her room which looked so exquisitely fresh and pure and dainty to her after the dingy closet at the Vannings. Probably the repentant girl found more to say to her mother than she had had time to do as yet. At any rate, it was nearly ten o'clock when Mrs. Herne came down again, and then her eyes were very red, though a kind smile came into them when she saw that Robin had taken her place in the arm-chair, and Ellice had subsided on to her stool again, and that both were looking so blissfully happy, that it was plain that if there had been any clouds between them, they had all been swept away in that cosy *tete-a-tete* by the home fire.

It was evident that if the sun was to shine on Hernecroft again it would be through these two young creatures, to whom the past trouble had only been a link to bind them together more fondly and faithfully than any ordinary wooing could have done.

When the Squire saw Ellice on the following day, he took her face in his shaking hands and kissed it, saying:

"Bless thee child. So thou'rt to be our child now for good! Well, well, I never guessed a maid from over seas would come to be mistress of the old place; but I doubt not the lad's chosen well for all that, Maid Ellice; an', fares to me, thou must ha' good Saxon blood in thee to love it an' us so well."

But Robin and Ellice were not to be married yet. Let not the reader suppose so. Owing to the poor Squire's infirmity making it improbable that he would ever be able to manage the farm again, it was desirable that his son should be at his side to manage in his place, and relinquish his previous idea of going into the law, unless indeed a steward were to be hired for the purpose instead. But to this alternative the Squire

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had a great objection; and Robin himself, with the prospect of a wife before him, and the experience he had gained of how ill London agreed with Ellice in comparison with the bracing Downshire air, was ready to give up all his forensic ambition, and would even have left college at once if it had not been his father's own wish that he should finish his course there and take his degree.

To Oxford accordingly he returned that term, and remained there another year before he returned for good; and almost immediately commenced seeing to the painting, altering, and furnishing of a certain pretty cottage residence, about three quarters of a mile from the Croft on the road to their other property at Hardleigh End.

All sorts of pretty things were brought down from London to this cottage; and Margaret and Ellice used to walk across the fields on summer evenings to see how it got on, and make suggestions as to this or that improvement; after which Robin generally escorted them home, full of triumph at the way in which it was progressing, and not unfrequently adding in an undertone which brought a bright blush into the cheek of the little maiden on his arm:

"And remember, as soon as *it* is ready for you, you will be for me, that's a bargain, eh, Ellice?"

Lottie Vanning and *her* sweetheart, however, had not waited for the day that saw Ellice leave Merehatch church a bride. You see there was no degree to be taken, or house built and furnished in their case; but Lottie had her "parlor to herself and best chiney," according to her old aspirations; and the Hernes could have told very accurately both where the said "chiney" (gilt roses on a pink ground) and the bran-new furniture of the parlor came from, not to say the smart gowns which Lottie and her sister wore at the marriage ceremony, and the rent of the tidy little room just above Mrs. Starling's which poor Fanny occupied during the short remaining years of her life.

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I have dwelt thus far on the happy side of this home reunion, and the pleasant peal and jingle of wedding bells, because there has been a great deal of sadness already in this plain, unvarnished story of mine, and I would fain wind up in a brighter key, and to that brightest and sweetest of all human strains, the marriage hymn, consummating innocent and happy loves. That there was a shadier and a sadder side to it none could doubt who had ever seen the white head and bowed figure of the old Squire when he was taken out in his wheeled chair on the sunny side of the house in the bright mornings, or the paled cheek and sorrowful lines about the mouth of the girl who never left his side, but sat by him and ministered to him with an untiring patience and tenderness of which those who had known her before could hardly believe her to be capable, and which used to make Mrs. Herne complain in a half-playful manner that she was only second fiddle to Maggie in looking after the master. She knew well that this consecration of her life to her father's service was the greatest comfort left to the girl whose early imprudence had left such a shadow on her life.

For Margaret had a very heavy cross to bear; and it pressed heaviest on her in the first year or so which followed her escapade. Notwithstanding all the care taken to keep the latter secret; nowithstanding the advertisement "To Maggie," still inserted in the *Times* for weeks after she was known to be in her place at home; and the unblushing lies told by the whole family when called on to discuss the girls' whereabouts, etc., during their absence—lies in which the motive was so pure and tender that, if it were not unorthodox, I could not almost think they were forgiven in the uttering: there were people who suspected something, and liked to keep their suspicions alive by frequent ventilation, people who say that it was very funny she should have gone away so suddenly, the very night the Squire had that stroke, too! And pray what brought

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on the latter in a man so hale and strong? Then some one had seen her talking to an artist gentleman on St. Anne's Hill; and there were even floating rumors of visits paid by a tall, dark young lady to the said artist's studio at Mitcham, and a clandestine correspondence kept up between that place and Miss Herne through the postmistress at Merehatch. Every one who knows the painful avidity for even the smallest and tamest bit of gossip in an English village will understand how eagerely these floating bits of scandal got repeated about and gathered together and made more of by each contributor's dividend of surmise and exaggeration; how Mrs. Calthorpe shook her head grimly, and declared she had always said there must be something very wrong about a girl who had shirked parish work and abjured Sunday-school, and generally conducted herself with the unbecoming independence from all authority which Margaret had always shown: how Miss Pelter asked suggestive questions of everybody in anxious whispers and with ruffled forehead and lifted brows; how Dr. Brown declined to make any answers on the subject in a stiff "I-know-more-than-I-say" manner, which raised curiosity ten times higher; and how the Vicar, when told of the current reports respecting his young parishioner, and called upon to say *something* about them, looked up from his folios and answered mildly that in the first place he didn't believe any of them, and, in the next, if it were possible that Margaret had run away and been brought back, he didn't see why she shouldn't have done the former by herself. That Romaic type of feature and coloring were never found without a corresponding strain in the character. Indeed the gipsy "wander-mania" had been known, even after laying dormant through more than one generation of mixed blood, to burst out with irrepressible force in some descendant otherwise as civilised and commonplace as any of its neighbors; and was going on pleasantly to prove from more than one generation authority that this mania generally showed

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itself in the male sex between ten and fourteen, and in the female between sixteen and nineteen, when he was abruptly silenced by his spouse, who told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself for talking such a heap of heterodox absurdity; that he might as well say no one was accountable for anything at that rate, and that she had no patience with him—a remark so indisputably true that the Vicar only raised his hands and answered mildly:

"My dear, I know it. It is the principal flaw in your otherwise amiable character, and is the chief reason why I have not been as severe as you wished with our youngest boy's exceedingly dictatorial and impatient disposition. Hereditary failings require far greater gentleness and forbearance than any other."

But though the Vicar might think thus, other people sided with his wife and Miss Pelter; and though no one knew anything for certain, there was a disposition among many, while the scandal lasted, to drop intimacy at the Croft, pass Margaret with a cool nod, and generally keep the girl at a distance—a line of conduct which she who had so long voluntarily held aloof from her neighbors now felt all the more keenly from her consciousness of its deservedness. She had a great deal to bear that winter; and perhaps not the least part of it was seeing how lovingly those about her tried to shield her from the punishment in which they, though innocent, where sharing; but I think that on the whole it was good for her character. It is impossible for people to brave all social laws and proprieties as Margaret had done, and yet come off unscathed in name and frame when their freak is over; and perhaps it is well for public order and morality that it should be so. The gossip wore itself out in time, as all gossip does even in the pettiest community unless it has something to revive or confirm it; and as Margaret had, as I have said, never grown intimate with her neighbors, and always avoided their invitations, unless compelled to the contrary, it was not easy for

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them to take the initiative in ostracising her now. Her still more rigid adherence then to her old habits in that respect caused less remark then it might otherwise have done, more especially now when her father's infirmity gave a proper and valid reason for it As long as *he* lived her days belonged to him; and though, even after his death, she still held to her rule of life, avoiding society when practicable, and devoting herself to her mother and Ellice's children instead, her own family found her gentler, humbler, and more sympathetic than it had once seemed probable that she could ever become. The shadow of her girlish escapade still hung over her own soul, and would rest there till the day of her death, but it had had a softening rather than an embittering influence, and had been long swept away from the memory of those about her. One thing was certain; from the day of her return that morbid craving for excitement, for strangers' faces, and that roar of cities which had haunted her like a fever dream, corroding her quiet life, never troubled her again. She had lived with that roar in her ears night and day, when its ceaseless turmoil nearly drove her mad, when wherever her yearning eyes turned they had found nothing but the faces of strangers looking carelessly on her, when her life had been one long nervous excitement of suspense and pain, wearing out mind and body alike. From the day she got back to her native hills, to the gurgling of reed-hidden streamlets and fragrance of wild thyme and prickly gorse, her one desire was never to leave them again; and the only occasion when she almost had a quarrel with Robin, was when he had planned to take a week in Paris on purpose to give her the treat of seeing it, and she had obstinately refused to go.

And Gordon Maxwell?

For nearly fifteen months after the morning he finished his work for Margaret by seeing the two girls into the train for Downshire, the family at the Croft, saw and heard next to nothing of that worthy, but un-

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sociable young man. As a matter of fact he was plodding away day after day at his old work between the engineer's office and the Holborn back slums; but he never came to the Croft, and seldom even wrote to Ellice. Since her engagement, indeed, he felt as if his moral guardianship had ceased. She did not appeal to him now for guidance in all her little difficulties. If she had any, there was Robin to go to instead; and besides being a much more indulgent guardian angel, Robin's strictures on her cousin's previous counsels, and the misunderstandings which had arisen through her obeying them, made her shrink from putting herself under the same authority again. She wrote often to him, but her letters were, as was natural, full of innocent talk about her lover, his achievements and opinions; all of which was exceedingly frivolous and uninteresting to the reader, and made him feel as if she had come down very much from the pinnacle of unworldliness on which he had striven to place her. There was no love lost between the two young men, for Robin could not forgive Gordon's churlishness and interference with regard to Ellice; and even Mrs. Herne said the lad was a sad bungler, and was offended at his not coming oftener to see them, wishing that he were more sociable and like other people. Only two held staunchly to him, and would never hear a word in his dispraise; the Squire, who stuck to it that, though he himself had been to blame, "the lad were right an' honest for taking the Maid Ellice out of a house where he found her guardian's son were makin' love to her wi'out the old man's consent. He didn't care if 't had been done clumsily, or if mistakes had come of it. 'Twas an upright, straightforward course to take, an' he respected the man as took it." While Margaret, though she seldom uttered his name, thought of him always as her saviour and defender, the man who had rescued her from Gerrant and self-murder, and put her conduct and duty before her as no one else had ever done.

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She saw him once again at the end of a year, when he was induced to spend Christmas at the Croft, and when he gave most of his attention to her, and their friendship became additionally strengthened, and after that never any more; for on his return to London he found a letter containing the news of his father's death; and one month later he entered the theological training college for priests at Hammersmith, with a gladness at renouncing the world, and its vanities (of which he knew so little!) which was only sobered by the thought that he owed the granting of his life's desire to the death rather than the kindness of a man who, faulty and erring as he might be, had been his own parent.

"But I did my duty to him while he lived. I gave up my own will for his; and I believe that if his soul—God rest it!—could come back, it would be the first to speed me onward now," the young man wrote to Ellice; and, considering that he had not seen his father since he was a mere boy, and had never received any affection or kindness from him since, it could hardly perhaps be expected that he would grieve very deeply over his loss.

One more sketch and I have done.

It is a summer's afternoon at the Croft. Under the great beech-tree on the lawn there is cool, green shade; but beyond the air is quivering in a haze of golden heat over beds of fragrant mignonette, old-fashioned stocks and dusky purple heliotrope. Huge velvety roses, creamy, pink and crimson, burst asunder from sheer weight of sun-blown beauty, and fall petal by petal on the parched soil. Tall, scarlet gladioli flicker in the sunbeams like spiral tongues of flame. Even the grey old house glows in the regal glory of the yellow jasmine and purple clematis, which wreathe its ancient front. It is a relief to look under the boughs of the beech, where, as in a shadowy tent of soft emerald light, sits a slim young mother, fair as a lily, and the incarnation of one of Muller's Madonnas in her

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cool blue linen gown, with the coils of light gold hair crowning her small head, and on her knee an infant fair and white as herself in its long draperies. Another child, a little girl about three years old and with Robin's merry dark eyes, is rolling on the grass, making a pyramid of the tiny brown scales and nuts which have fallen from the beech-tree; and the mother is reading a letter with a smile on her pretty lips. It is laid down however the next moment, though the smile deepens into a still sweeter expression; for some one parts the branches, and, coming into the pleasant shadow, flings himself down with a sigh of relief at her side.

"Tired, Robin *mio?*" says Ellice, laying her cool hand on his brow. "You look it."

"Well, I am a little. I had to go the Hall to see Sir George about that horse he wishes me to buy; and then went out of my way to call at the Cottage coming back. By the way, the Amadrews want us to dine there on Thursday. I said you would go."

"That was bad of you when you know I don't like leaving baby while he's so young. However, they are so very friendly and cordial; and if it is your will and pleasure, sir! But how were the mother and Maggie?"

"Well as they can be; and Maggie deep in her books. My old study at the Cottage she has made hers now, and mother says she is learning mad since she first decided to undertake the teaching of wee Daisy here;" and he began tickling and pulling the brown curls of the round-limbed, laughing damsel who was already seated astride his chest. "Who's your letter from, Ellie?"

"Gordon. You must read it; for it is very interesting. If he had only not volunteered to go to that fever-stricken swamp, and where the natives are so treacherous too! but he seems hard at work from morning till night, and as happy as a king. What a change there is in his letters, Robin! There is never

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any dryness in them now, and he seems to enter into our home life and sympathies so much more than he did. He likes to hear all my anecdotes of Daisy, and wants Margaret to try and make a sketch of her for him; and there is a whole list of books he thinks will be useful to Margaret in her reading. I must show her the letter; she will be pleased."

"Ah! he was always a priest and missionary at heart," said Robin; "and a man in his own groove is as different from one out of it as a man swimming with the stream from one buffeting against it and fighting with every wave that opposes him. The square in a round hole, makes its angles felt at each turn of the circle, and Father Gordon among those precious black scamps, his converts, is a much jollier fellow than Gordon Maxwell, Esq., who——" but a hand is laid on his mouth, and he is not allowed to go on.

"Be quiet!" says his pretty wife imperiously. "He was a dear old Galahad then, though he did make mistakes sometimes and want all the world to be cut to his own pattern; and I am very glad I called baby after him. Their eyes are just alike."

She little thought that the blue eyes she spoke of were even then closed in death; and that long before Margaret's sketch could reach him, his body, pierced through and through by Indian arrows, had been buried at the foot of the primitive little altar where he had been shot down while giving the Bread of Life to a couple of his dusky converts.

There was a smile bright and triumphant as the light of God upon his face when they heaped the sods above it.

THE END.

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